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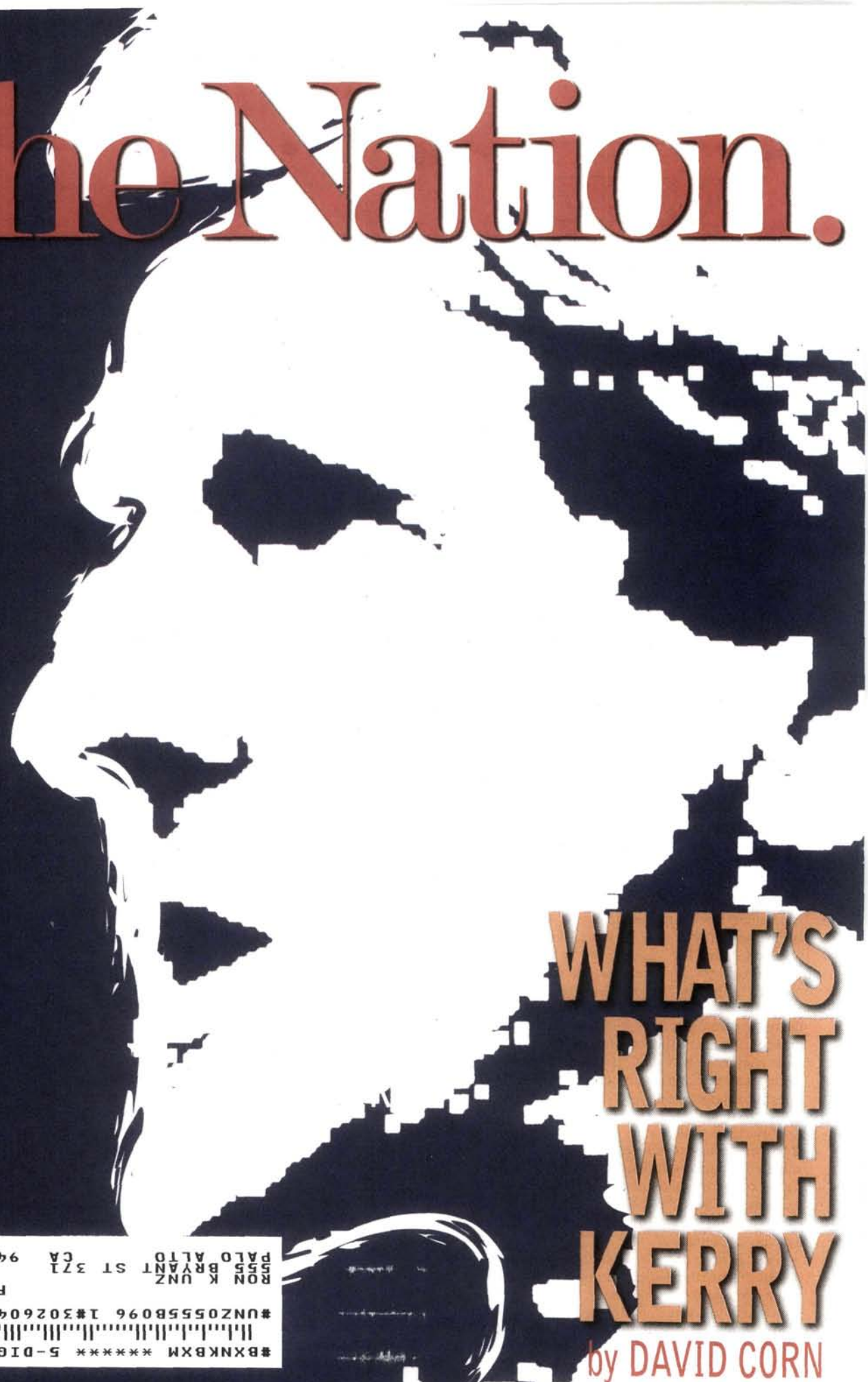

WHAT'S RIGHT WITH KERRY

by DAVID CORN

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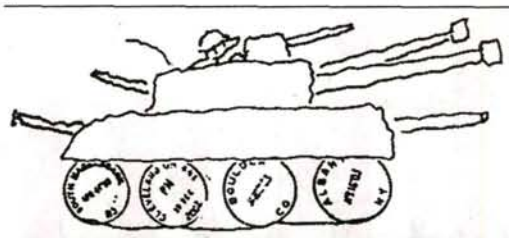

EXCHANGE

R.O. BLECHMAN

Springtime for Hitler?

The editor's note "disagreeing profoundly" with Alexander Cockburn's January 26 "Beat the Devil" column titled "Bush as Hitler? Let's Be Fair" caused a flurry of mail, as did the column itself. About 95 percent of letter-writers were perplexed as to why the note was written. There was a broader range of opinion on whether George W. Bush can be compared to Adolf Hitler. —*The Editors*

New York City

■ I am puzzled by your disavowal of Alexander Cockburn's column. Is it not the analogy to Germany in 1932 that inspires your appeal to readers to shun Nader and unite behind anyone but Bush? JOHN L. HESS

Gray, Me.

■ Shame on you for your editor's note distancing yourself from Alexander Cockburn's column. There *are* many differences. But certainly one can look at how an authoritarian clique might take over a society. I've heard Isabel Allende speak of the military takeover of her country. I've heard an older German speak of how—like a frog being slowly boiled—her people could always deny what was going on. Hitler depended on everyday normal people to play their part. Don't tell me we can't learn from that. CHRIS MILLER

New York City

■ More inexplicable—indeed, surreal—than Alexander Cockburn's amusing, if bizarre, comparison of George W. Bush to Adolf Hitler was the fact that *The Nation* found those analogies sufficiently troubling to require a disclaimer. "What the hell did Cockburn say?" I asked myself as I turned the page, only to find the usual mélange of exaggeration, deliberate provocation and valid insight—in short, the same combination of silliness, courage, liberal-baiting and trenchant commentary for which Cockburn is rightly famous. RITA C. TOBIN

Kaohsiung, Taiwan

■ Since Katrina vanden Heuvel took the rather silly step of publicly disassociating herself from Alex Cockburn's column on Bush/Hitler comparisons, and thus implicitly with my *CounterPunch* columns on the same topic, I must make a couple of points.

First, in none of my three columns did I say that Bush is another Hitler. My point in looking at the two regimes in their early stages is that both used the same strategies—war, fearmongering, scapegoating of minority groups and the Big Lie—to expand their power.

I would not compare Bush and the RNC leadership to Hitler and the Nazis in 1939 or later, when Jews were being killed and when the German nation was at war with all of Europe. One hopes that even Karl Rove and John Ashcroft, in their drive for, respectively, political power and racial and religious purity, will not drag this nation down to that level of depravity and evil. My comparison is with Hitler and his National Socialists in the early and mid-1930s, when, as today in America, much of the "respectable" media, both in *der Vaterland* and abroad, were treating Hitler with respect.

No doubt the leftist fringe critics who in the 1930s were writing alarmist pieces drawing comparisons of Hitler to Attila the Hun or Ivan the Terrible were, like today's Bush critics, being disavowed by more "responsible" editors. I suspect that the fear engendered by the kinds of analogies drawn by Alex and me is that they might offend those who want to hold the Holocaust out as a singular evil in history, and Hitler as a uniquely evil leader. Sadly, he is not unique, except in the scale of his crimes. Recall that in the early days of the massacre of 2 million Cambodians by Pol Pot and his gang of mad Communists, those who began referring to that genocide as a holocaust were criticized by the guardians of the Holocaust. Eventually, as the numbers of dead soared past the first million mark, the atrocity that devoured a third of a nation was permitted to bear that badge of distinction.

Remember, analogies are used all the time—as they should be—and as anyone with a high school math background should know, "analogous to" ought not be confused with an equals sign. There are very troubling goings-on in Washington—a campaign of war without end, the termination of the sanctity of citizenship, a return to Cointelpro, corruption of the very process of counting votes, the equating of political opposition with support for terrorism. In such scary times, it is not at all unreasonable to look back to the last time such tactics were employed, to see what they produced.

DAVE LINDORFF

Redmond, Wash.

■ I have long valued *The Nation*'s willingness to publish opinions at odds with its editorial policy. It pains me to write this, but—in spite of the editor's note—I question whether *The Nation* should have accepted Alexander Cockburn's column on Hitler/Bush comparisons. I write this as a onetime admirer of Cockburn and his courage in taking and successfully articulating contrarian positions.

But portraying Adolf Hitler as some sort of liberal Keynesian is beyond bad taste: It's a racist apology conveniently ignoring the reality that the Nazi economy was built on slave labor, that the "government" was a kleptocracy and that the Hitlerite plan for paying for the whole mess was to conquer and occupy Eastern Europe. I suppose it's possible that there was some leg-pulling going on; if so, I for one don't get the joke. *The Nation* and its readers would have been best served had the editor refused to publish.

PAUL GOODE

Los Angeles

■ Thanks to *The Nation*'s editor for distancing herself from Alexander Cockburn's outrageous column. Cockburn thinks it's cute to put Bush and Hitler in the same category—"warmonger"—as if that really explained anything about either German fascism or American democracy. You can almost see Cockburn giggle with joy writing that Bush hasn't sent anyone to the gas chambers—"at least not yet." As attorney Joseph Welch said to Senator Joe McCarthy: "Have you no decency?" Cockburn praises Hitler as the "first practicing Keynesian leader" because the Nazi government reduced the German unemployment rate to 1 percent. Perhaps Cockburn would like to restore slavery, American history's sure-fire full-employment policy!

The Bush Administration has done many awful things, but implying that the United States is on the brink of fascism is politically irresponsible, exaggerates right-wing forces' ability to eliminate civil liberties and minimizes the work of progressives fighting for social justice. Cockburn clearly doesn't care about building a movement, winning or actually improving the lives of working people. He prefers to tweak progressives from the ultra-left-wing sidelines and throw water on possibilities for change. This is the same Cockburn who two years ago urged the Green Party to run a candidate against Senator Paul Wellstone, then in a tight race, because Paul wasn't radical enough for Cockburn. Unfortunately, this is typical of Cockburn's writings.

If Cockburn didn't exist, the *Wall Street Journal* would have to invent him. Indeed, he apparently enjoys the right-wing media's attacks on his Bush-Hitler analogies. "Look at me!" he seems to be saying, with all the self-awareness of a 5-year-old. Cockburn delights in being outrageous, but he's an embarrassment to the vast majority of progressives who find his "more radical than thou" rants juvenile and reckless. His column tarnishes *The Nation*'s reputation.

PETER DREIER

(Continued on Page 24)

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IN THIS ISSUE

EXCHANGE

2 SPRINGTIME FOR HITLER?
John L. Hess, Chris Miller, Rita C. Tobin, Dave Lindorff, Paul Goode, Peter Dreier, Ezra Sherman, Alexander Cockburn

EDITORIALS & COMMENT

3 CANDIDATE NADER

4 PRESS WATCH
Floating With the Tide
Scott Sherman

5 WAS STROM A RAPIST?
Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw

7 UNDEMOCRATIC PROCESS
Wayne S. Smith

7 IN FACT...

COLUMNS

8 DEADLINE POET
Farewell, Howard Dean
Calvin Trillin

9 SUBJECT TO DEBATE
Toothpaste, Cough Drops, Aspirin, Contraception
Katha Pollitt

10 STOP THE PRESSES
Novak's No Patriot (or Journalist)
Eric Alterman

ARTICLES

11 WHAT'S RIGHT WITH KERRY
At key moments, he's displayed guts and taken tough, sometimes lonely, positions.
David Corn

14 HOLY MATRIMONY!
As politicians square off on gay marriage, progressives must enter the debate.
Lisa Duggan

19 LETTER FROM PARIS
In the form of a law regarding the wearing of the Islamic hijab, women's bodies are a battlefield—again.
Maria Margaronis

22 HOW EDISON SURVIVED
Discredited and broke, the school privatizer found an unlikely white knight.
David Moberg

BOOKS & THE ARTS

25 SHIPLER: The Working Poor: Invisible in America
Katherine Newman

26 THE OLD COUPLE
(poem)
Robert Bly

28 GUILLERMOPRIETO: Dancing With Cuba: A Memoir of the Revolution
Achy Obejas

30 THE PLEASURES OF CRIME
Foreign *noir* novels come to America.
Hillary Frey

34 FILMS
The Passion of the Christ
Stuart Klawans

Cover by Gene Case and Stephen Kling/Avenging Angels; illustrations by R.O. Blechman, Peter O. Zierlein

EDITORIALS

Candidate Nader

Ralph Nader got a lot of things right when he appeared on NBC's *Meet the Press* and accused "Katherine Harris and Jeb Bush and their cohorts from Tallahassee to the Supreme Court" of stealing the 2000 election for George W. Bush, dismissed the President as "a giant corporation in the White House masquerading as a human being" and castigated the Commander in Chief for committing "high crimes and misdemeanors" when he misled the nation into war on Iraq.

But he got the important thing wrong when he announced he would run for President.

We have already laid out our reasons why we believe he should not be a candidate again (see "An Open Letter to Ralph Nader," February 16). Stubbornness is one of Ralph's most attractive qualities. If he weren't stubborn (and principled and idealistic), he would have stopped writing about unsafe cars back in the 1950s when General Motors had him tailed by private detectives. Nor would the country have the public interest movement, which he more than any other citizen did so much to create.

But sometimes stubbornness can keep one from seeing changed realities. Given that this Administration has misled the country into an illegal, pre-emptive war; slashed taxes for the wealthy; trampled civil liberties; and assaulted labor, choice, gay rights and affirmative action, the difference between Republicans and Democrats is not a matter of "D minus" and "D plus," as Ralph characterized it on *Meet the Press*. It is a matter of pass/fail, and the Bush Administration has failed abysmally.

On the Sunday- and Monday-morning interview shows and elsewhere, Ralph has said that those opposed to his run for President, whom he dubs the "liberal intelligentsia" (including this magazine), want to "censor" him and to block the American people from having "more choices and voices."

Speaking only for ourselves, as a magazine that has always supported more voices and choices, we believe he has the right to run. The question has always been whether it was wise for him to do so.

The Nation has a long history of backing (and not backing) third parties. In 1920 editor Oswald Garrison Villard advised readers, "Don't throw away your vote" on either one of the two major-party candidates. "The vote of protest is never a lost vote," he wrote. But there are protests and there are protests. The magazine, for example, supported the Socialist Party candidate, Norman Thomas, in 1932 rather than the Democrat, Franklin Roosevelt. But in 1936, 1940 and 1944 it backed Roosevelt, because the editors considered him the best candidate to deal with the economic crisis and to prosecute the war effort.

The point is that such choices must be made on a case-by-case basis. We have no special ties to the Democratic Party, but the choice between it and the GOP this election is blindingly clear. Given the dangerous alternative of four more years of the most extremist Administration in our lifetime, is this really the year to cast a symbolic vote?

Citizen Nader's critique of the corporatization of politics has much to recommend it. Candidate Nader's request for your vote is a dangerous distraction.

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COMMENT

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Floating With the Tide

The conduct of our major newspapers in the run-up to the Iraq war calls to mind William Hazlitt's famous appraisal of the *Times* of London. "It floats with the tide," Hazlitt wrote in 1823. "It sails with the stream." Two new studies—one by Michael Massing in the February 26 *New York Review of Books*, which surveys news articles; the other by Chris Mooney in the March/April *Columbia Journalism Review*, which examines unsigned editorials—document the extent to which our elite press sailed with the stream in the decisive months leading up to the invasion of Iraq. Together, these articles paint a disconcerting portrait of a timid, credulous press corps that, when confronted by an Administration intent on war, sank to new depths of obsequiousness and docility.

Embedded in Massing's prosecutorial brief against the press are the following charges: the dissemination of White House misinformation on Iraq; the embrace of dubious Iraqi defectors and exiles as sources; a lack of curiosity about debates in the intelligence community concerning US allegations about Iraq's WMD capabilities; and a cavalier disregard for the International Atomic Energy Agency. Much of Massing's firepower is directed at the *New York Times* in general and one reporter—Judith Miller—in particular. It was Miller (with Michael Gordon) who produced, on September 8, 2002, an article titled "US Says Hussein Intensifies Quest for A-Bomb Parts," which reported that Iraq had tried to import thousands of high-strength aluminum tubes with the purpose of producing enriched uranium and, eventually, an atomic weapon. Bush Administration "hard-liners," according to Miller and Gordon, feared nothing less than "a mushroom cloud." The same day the article appeared, Dick Cheney and Condoleezza Rice parroted the charges about the tubes on the Sunday-morning chat shows. "We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud," Rice intoned on CNN.

"In the following months," Massing writes, "the tubes would become a key prop in the administration's case for war, and the *Times* played a critical part in legitimizing it." A crucial element of the legitimation process was the *Times*'s disregard for experts who didn't share the White House's dark view of Saddam's WMD capabilities. The only national news organization that emerges unscathed from Massing's inquiry is the low-profile Washington bureau of the Knight Ridder newspaper chain—which includes the *Miami Herald*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *San Jose Mercury News*—whose hard-hitting stories were based on the doubts and fears of military, intelligence and diplomatic officials, many of whom believed that the White House was misinterpreting and fabricating evidence about Iraq's bellicosity.

Miller has been the subject of much scrutiny [see Russ Baker, "'Scoops' and Truth at the *Times*," June 23, 2003], but Massing has produced the most authoritative account of her deferential posture vis-à-vis the Bush Administration. Massing asked Miller why her stories did not generally include the views of skeptical WMD experts; her reply is jaw-dropping: "My job isn't to assess the government's information and be an independent intelligence analyst myself," Miller averred. "My job is to tell readers of the *New York*

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Times what the government thought of Iraq's arsenal." Massing adds, with appropriate gravity: "Many journalists would disagree with this; instead they would consider offering an independent evaluation of official claims one of their chief responsibilities."

Miller, it turns out, has no monopoly on docility. *CJR*'s survey of editorials makes it distressingly apparent that our top newspapers did not abstain from the chance to inform their readers about "what the government thought" of Iraq's supposed arsenal. Mooney examined more than eighty editorials in half a dozen papers—the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *Los Angeles Times* and *Chicago Tribune*—for a six-week period, starting with Colin Powell's February 5 speech to the United Nations and concluding with the onset of hostilities on March 19. It's worth noting that Mooney, a freelance writer in Washington, had no ideological ax to grind. In the months leading up to the war, he was a "liberal hawk" who expressed prowar sentiments on his blog. To a certain extent, his piece is a reckoning with himself. (Full disclosure: I was a *CJR* staff member from 2001–03 and remain on the magazine's masthead in an advisory capacity.)

The *CJR* report is largely about the reaction to Powell's speech, which was rapturously received by editorialists. "Irrefutable," proclaimed the *Washington Post*. Powell "may not have produced a 'smoking gun,'" ventured the *New York Times*, but the speech left "little question that Mr. Hussein had tried hard to conceal one." International newspapers—including the British *Guardian*—treated the speech as one side of an ongoing UN debate about Iraq's WMD capacities and gave ample coverage to the opposing views of Hans Blix and the IAEA's Mohammed ElBaradei, who maintained that Iraq did not have them. "Without appearing to weigh such contrary evidence," Mooney writes, "the US papers all essentially pronounced Powell right, though they couldn't possibly know for sure that he was. In short, they *trusted* him. And in so doing, they failed to bring even an elementary skepticism to the Bush case for war."

Mooney was struck by the "strongly nationalistic character" of the editorials under review and the "almost knee-jerk tendency to distrust international perspectives"—a sentiment that, in many cases, led editorialists to minimize and dismiss the findings of Blix and ElBaradei. In March 2003, the latter informed the UN that there was little evidence of an active Iraqi nuclear program, but the prowar newspapers in the *CJR* study simply "shrugged off" ElBaradei's critique. At least one of them—the *Wall Street Journal*—heaped scorn on the inspectors. When Saddam Hussein insisted that he did not possess WMDs, the *Journal* sneered, "If you believe that, you are probably a Swedish weapons inspector."

What do the editorial page editors say in their own defense? "We don't discuss the process that goes into writing the editorials," the *New York Times*'s Gail Collins told *CJR*. "I will go off my normal rule to say I wish we'd known there were no weapons of mass destruction." Said Janet Clayton of the *Los Angeles Times*: "I do wish we'd been more skeptical of Powell's WMD claims before the UN." Others remain faithful to their own discredited narratives. "I'm not going to second-guess what we wrote," said the *Chicago Tribune*'s Bruce Dold. "If indeed [Saddam] did not have weapons—and I think it's all still an open question—the fact was that he didn't comply, and the UN had looked the other way while hundreds of thousands of people had died in Iraq."

In the months after the war ended, major US newspapers—especially the *Washington Post*—recovered their skepticism and began to challenge aggressively the Administration's justifications for war. But it was too little, too late: When we needed them most, they weren't there. *CJR* gave the last word to the intelligence writer Thomas Powers. "All these papers are on notice," Powers said. "They've seen what happened. They were hustled."

SCOTT SHERMAN

Scott Sherman is a contributing writer to The Nation.

Was Strom a Rapist?

Months after Strom Thurmond's African-American daughter, Essie Mae Washington-Williams, stepped into history, commentators continue to step around the most explosive aspect of this controversy with the same stealth that ushered Thurmond into interracial fatherhood at 22. Thurmond, icon of the Bible-toting, family-values-promoting right, not only contradicted his segregationist credo by impregnating young Carrie Butler in 1925, he most likely violated the law against statutory rape. Yet the very real possibility that Butler was a victim of an illegal sexual assault has been virtually ignored by a media eager to commend Thurmond's families for playing nice. The celebration of their gentility and patience implies that it would be indecorous to raise the question of whether this all-American story began in sexual abuse.

Any serious inquiry into the likelihood that Butler was the victim of statutory rape was precluded by the *Washington Post*'s inaccurate report that the age of consent in South Carolina was 14 in 1925, which was widely repeated in print and electronic media. In fact, a South Carolina statute enacted in 1922 criminalized the carnal knowledge of any woman under 16. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine whether Thurmond violated that law without Butler's birth date, for which there are no records. But we do know that when she delivered her child on October 12, 1925, she was at most 16—according to Washington-Williams, Butler was born in 1909 or 1910. The only way the conclusion of statutory rape could be avoided is if Butler was born no later than early January 1909, and conception occurred just after her sixteenth birthday. Of course, the odds are against this meticulous alignment.

No doubt apologists will remind us that the possibility of statutory rape does not alone suggest that Butler did not consent to the act. But in a climate characterized by fear and abject racial intimidation, the question of whether Carrie Butler, an impoverished maid in the Thurmond family household, freely consented is virtually meaningless. The more telling question is whether there was any way she could freely say no. Even as a teenager, Butler had to understand that her chances of protecting her sexual autonomy against the desires of the determined son of Edgefield's most prominent family were virtually nonexistent. The protection law promised was empty; after all, statutory

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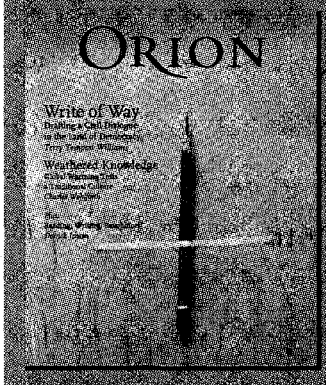

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COMMENT

rape laws were not written to protect girls like Butler.

For most critics of sexual racism, this is simply a textbook case of a white man getting away with sexual behavior that would have sent an African-American man to his death. Needless to say, had either of Thurmond's underaged twin sisters given birth to a mocha-colored baby, somebody would have had to pay, most likely with his life. In fact, Thurmond was not only a privileged recipient of this double standard, he was one of its perpetrators. In 1942, Judge Thurmond sent George Thomas, a black man, to the electric chair based on an alleged rape victim's cross-race identification, testimony now known to be extremely unreliable. Thurmond refused defense pleas to move the trial to a safer venue, even though the community's lust for Thomas's lynching grew so feverish the National Guard had to be called in. A jury took little more than an hour to convict the defendant, notwithstanding the exculpatory testimony of at least nine people who placed the defendant elsewhere at the time of the alleged rape. The defendant's only chance of survival was destroyed when Thurmond misled the appellate court about the lynch-mob atmosphere that pervaded the trial.

While the repression of black male sexuality dominates most discussions of sexual racism, the silence surrounding the sexual abuse of black women remains relatively unexplored. The contemporary media's refusal to acknowledge Carrie Butler as a likely victim of such abuse reflects the sexual racism that black women continue to face today.

Indeed, the possibility that Thurmond's transgression might have gone beyond statutory rape to include the use of force has not even been raised. Yet consider what is known about Thurmond. In 1924 he had already developed a reputation in college for his sexually aggressive conduct—and this was with white women. Thurmond's sexually inappropriate behavior didn't end there; stories abound about his groping women in the Capitol, including a senator and a government agent. If Thurmond was not above the unwelcome fondling of some of America's most powerful women long after the women's movement established that such boorish behavior was unacceptable, is it such a stretch to imagine him ignoring the protests of a powerless black teenager in 1925?

This is precisely the kind of horror black women workers confronted for generations. One of the first lessons black girls were taught was to beware sexually predatory white men. No doubt that's why African-American women were among the first plaintiffs to challenge sexual harassment on the job as employment discrimination. After decades of workplace sexual abuse deformed the lives of black women like Butler, they were especially attuned to the connection between harassment and discrimination.

The sexual abuse of black women has long been the crime with no name; even today black women's claims are the least likely to be believed, and their abusers are the least likely to be punished. The defaming of black women as promiscuous is so deeply rooted in our culture that the victim's race is still more significant than all other factors in determining whether the alleged assailants will be arrested, charged, convicted and incarcerated.

The failure to acknowledge the elephant in the middle of the Thurmond revelation speaks volumes about the brutish life black women faced in 1925. If we cannot muster the courage nearly

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COMMENT

eighty years later to call it out, then the Thurmond bombshell, far from revealing how far we've come, tells us much more about how far we haven't. KIMBERLÉ WILLIAMS CRENSHAW

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw is a professor of law at UCLA and Columbia law schools and is a regular commentator on NPR's The Tavis Smiley Show.

Undemocratic Process

There has been much comment about the take-no-prisoners approach of the Congressional Republican leadership in cramming through the Medicare prescription-drug benefit this past November 22. Procedural rules were ignored. House Democrats were barred from conference committees. And since the Republicans didn't have enough votes of their own as the session opened, the usual fifteen-minute rule in the House for roll-call votes was simply put aside. The roll call went on for almost three hours, until enough reluctant Republicans had been threatened and browbeaten into changing their votes to allow the bill to squeak through. Democrat Barney Frank of Massachusetts said it might be "the end of parliamentary democracy as we have known it."

But it was not the worst case. A far more chilling episode, little remarked and with even graver portent for the future of the democratic process, occurred on November 12. A small group of leading Republicans ordered stripped from this year's Treasury-Transportation appropriations bill an amendment (already approved) that prohibited the use of Treasury funds to enforce controls on travel to Cuba. They did this behind closed doors and before the conferees had even met to consider the disposition of the amendment. As Democratic Senator Max Baucus, one of the amendment's sponsors, pointed out in a subsequent statement, "It wasn't the conferees [who removed it]. Thirteen of the sixteen

In Fact . . .

OFF THE PAIGE

■ "Terrorist" is surely the blackest epithet in the Bush Administration's lexicon, so it would seem that Education Secretary Rod Paige owes the NEA more than just an apology for calling it a "terrorist organization." Especially, one would think, when the union's only sin was exercising its right of free speech to criticize aspects of the fancifully titled "No Child Left Behind" Act. Perhaps Paige is following the John Ashcroft model of branding critics of the Patriot Act pro-terrorist. Paige has been under fire in many states that say the Administration hasn't put enough money behind the act. So he needed a scapegoat. Who better than that old antiunion-GOP reliable—the NEA? Paige should go.

STOP THE COMCAST-DISNEY MERGER

■ Jeff Chester writes: Will the move by Comcast, the nation's largest cable TV and broadband giant, to swallow up Disney/ABC spark a new round of protests against the looser FCC rules? So far, Senators Kerry and Edwards—as well as other leading Democrats—have failed to publicly oppose what would be the biggest media merger in US history. Only a year ago, Comcast acquired AT&T Cable. It already dominates the TV business in eight out of ten of the largest communities in the country. Now it wants to add to its empire ABC TV, ESPN and Disney's movie studios and theme parks. Comcast plans to push Disney content using the might of its cable and Internet pipes. Expect the web to turn into a commercially sponsored corporate theme park. Comcast has mobilized a phalanx of heavy-hitter lobbyists, including former Pentagon PR chief Victoria Clarke, recent top aides to Senate minority leader Tom Daschle, ex-Representative Dick Armey and Representative Billy Tauzin. Not only does Comcast seek to expand, it has exemplified an anti–public interest philosophy: unionbusting and opposing "open" Internet proposals. John Kerry's cable-TV connection (his brother is a lawyer for one of the big cable lobbying firms) raises questions about how tied into Big Media he is. He and John Edwards, among others, should feel pressure from those who want to restrain the media giants. Opposing Comcast's Disney/ABC takeover should be high on the progressive agenda.

BLAIR OUTGUNNED

■ British Prime Minister Tony Blair's government has dropped its case against Katharine Gun, the former intelligence officer charged under the Official Secrets Act after she leaked a memo alleging an American campaign to spy on UN delegates before the Iraq war (see D.D. Guttenplan, "Whitewashing Blair," February 23). The announcement came one day after Gun's legal team served documents on the government demanding to see any advice given to ministers about the legality of the war—disclosures that could have been potentially damaging and embarrassing for the government. Gun had maintained that the memo, which reportedly described a "surge" in US eavesdropping on UN Security Council countries crucial to the vote on a second resolution for action in Iraq, exposed serious wrongdoing and could have helped prevent the deaths of Iraqis and British forces in an illegal war. The government dismissed the suggestion that its decision and the request for documents were linked but declined to give any formal reason for its decision. Gun said, "I have no regrets, and I would do it again."

NEWS OF THE WEAK IN REVIEW

■ The recent Economic Report of the President suggests that jobs in the fast-food industry should be reclassified as manufacturing jobs. Its authors claim there's only a difference in degree between assembling a Big Mac at McDonald's and assembling an Explorer at Ford. Yeah, sure. And think what this little statistical fix would do to those embarrassing manufacturing-job-loss figures! It's the biggest Orwellian shell game since the Reaganites reclassified ketchup as a vegetable in school lunches.

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Senate conferees were supportive.... [They] would not have stripped out the amendment." Who then? According to Republican Senator Michael Enzi of Wyoming, another amendment sponsor, "It was stripped out by committee staffers even before members of the committee formally met. There was no vote taken. Poof, it just disappeared into the Congressional ether."

But how could that happen? The measure had been approved on the floor of the House in September by a bipartisan vote of 227 to 188 and in the Senate in October by a 59-to-36 vote, with a number of key Republicans voting in favor. Clearly it was the will of the majority in Congress, reflecting the will of the American people. The language in the House and Senate versions was identical, so there was nothing for the conferees to reconcile. By Congressional rules, it should have moved forward to the President's desk with the rest of the bill, for him to sign or veto.

Why did it not do so? Because the President had put out the word that he would veto any measure that weakened controls on travel to Cuba. Under procedural rules, he could not simply veto the Cuba travel amendment; he'd have to veto the entire appropriations bill, a far more serious matter. Although funding for Treasury and Transportation might have been kept flowing with a continuing resolution, that was by no means certain. Hence, blocking the travel amendment risked at least temporary paralysis of these key agencies, to the distinct embarrassment of the President.

And yet, the dilemma could have come as no surprise, for the President knew all along that the amendment would be attached to the Treasury-Transportation appropriations bill, where it had appeared three years in a row. Would he really have used the veto? We'll never know. In order that his bluff not be called and that he not be forced to put his money where his mouth had taken him, he had his minions in Congress remove the amendment. According to one senior Republican staffer quoted by the *New York Times*, they were "not going to put a bill on the floor that potentially embarrasses the President."

Thus was the democratic process desecrated. Indeed, if this is the way President Bush intends to play the game, then our whole democratic system is in danger. WAYNE S. SMITH

Wayne S. Smith, an adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins University, is a senior fellow at the Center for International Relations in Washington.

CALVIN TRILLIN

FAREWELL, HOWARD DEAN

A vote of thanks is due to Dr. Dean,
A comet on the presidential scene.
Once sure to win, he lost it all instead.
He made mistakes, but still it should be said
That Democrats who aren't completely dense'll
Admit he put the lead back in their pencil.

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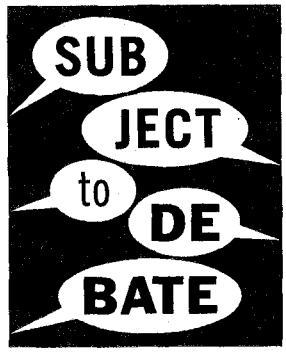
KATHA POLLITT

Toothpaste, Cough Drops, Aspirin, Contraception



For a moment it looked as if the FDA was going to do the right thing. It was going to go with medical science and make emergency contraception available over the counter, so that women who've had unprotected sex would have ready access to a postcoital method that prevents pregnancy 89 percent of the time. This was, after all, the overwhelming recommendation of its own advisory committee (of twenty-seven members, only three voted against OTC status, all professionally undistinguished Bush appointees from the Christian right: David Hager, the notorious promoter of prayer as the cure for PMS and denier of birth control to unmarried women; and Susan Crockett and Joseph Stanford, who won't prescribe it, period).

It makes sense: After all, emergency contraception, also known as the morning-after pill and marketed as Plan B and Preven, is only a quadruple helping of certain birth control pills. Women in the know have been dosing themselves this way for years; the FDA found it safe and effective in 1999. EC is available over the counter or directly from a pharmacist in some seventeen countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Canada and Portugal. The current system in the United States, in which women have to find a doctor or clinic and a pharmacy that stocks EC ideally within twenty-four hours (EC works for seventy-two hours, but less effectively as time goes on), is clearly too cumbersome. In a few states—California and Washington, for example—pharmacists can dispense it directly, which is better, but still an unnecessary complication.

You would think that anti-choicers would leap to embrace emergency contraception, which, according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, already prevents 51,000 abortions a year, making it a significant, if little-noted, factor in the decline in abortion. This is the Bush Administration, though, in which science and women's rights and the actual, factual lessening of the need for abortion are all less important than "values"—i.e., the narrow ideology of the Christian right. In December, forty-four Congressional Republicans sent a letter to the FDA advisory committee urging its members to reject OTC status: EC "stacked casually on shelves next to toothpaste and cough drops" would allow "our schoolchildren" easy access to a drug that, according to Jesse Helms, is an "abortifacient." After the committee endorsed it, forty-nine Congressional Republicans sent another letter, this time expressing alarm at "the impact this decision will have on the sexual behavior of adolescents." On February 16, FDA head Mark McClellan (brother of Bush press secretary Scott McClellan) postponed the agency's decision; now he's leaving to take charge of Medicare, and EC risks being delayed again by future appointees.

Years ago, pundits scoffed when prochoicers argued that antis would target birth control too if they could. EC primarily works by preventing ovulation and fertilization, but like the birth control pill, it may also prevent the implantation of a fertilized egg in the womb. As Gloria Feldt, head of Planned Parenthood, pointed out when I spoke to her by phone, "antichoice people are trying to redefine pregnancy to begin at fertilization rather than implantation," which is the medical definition of pregnancy, and EC is the wedge. If EC is a "human pesticide," so are the Pill, the patch, injectables. If "schoolchildren" ought not purchase EC without parental supervision or knowledge, nor should they be able to obtain those forms of contraception without parental permission, as current law allows. And if being able to purchase EC like "aspirin or hairspray" promotes promiscuity—studies suggest, by the way, that it will not—the same can be alleged of birth control in general. In fact, contraception has always been attacked as promoting loose morals among women (curiously, "schoolchildren" excepted, one hears less about the fact that condoms promote loose morals among men—why not make them available only by prescription, too?).

Recently a pharmacist and two assistants at an Eckerts drugstore in Denton, Texas, refused to fill an EC prescription for a teenage rape victim (they were fired). In Virginia, state legislator Robert Marshall, who last year was able to prevent James Madison University from filling EC prescriptions, is noisily seeking to extend the ban to all the state's public colleges and universities. EC, he claims, turns young women into "chemical Love Canals for frat house playboys." Instead of the natural love canals God meant them to be? This spurious concern for women's health is the cousin of the argument that abortion should be banned because it is "traumatic" for women—a line that has persuaded the state legislature of South Dakota to pass a flagrantly unconstitutional ban on all abortions and that Norma McCorvey, Roe of *Roe v. Wade*, is pushing in her ridiculous attempt to get the decision overturned on the grounds that she has changed her mind—about an abortion she never had.

Doctors and clinics are beginning to offer prescriptions for women in advance of need, which is great. But women can be proactive too. At a recent demonstration in New York City, women symbolically handed EC pills to others, declaring their willingness to break the law to put the drug in the hands of any woman who needs it (it is illegal to give a prescription medication to someone for whom it has not been prescribed). Any woman with the right kind of birth control pills can package her own EC and share it; years ago, journalist Debbie Nathan would walk into Mexico from her home in El Paso, buy birth control pills for two dollars a cycle and make EC necklaces with foil, glitter and charms. Until women can pick up EC along with, yes, "aspirin or hairspray," that ingenuity and boldness is just what we need.

* * *

March 10 is National Day of Appreciation for Abortion Providers—a time to honor the people who put themselves on the line every day for women's rights. Send a card to your local clinic and a donation, even a small one, to the National Network of Abortion Funds, which helps pay for abortions for women who can't afford them: NNAF c/o Hampshire College, Amherst, MA 01002; www.nnaf.org. ■

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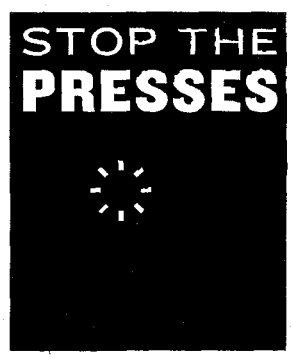
ERIC ALTERMAN

Novak's No Patriot (or Journalist)



Journalists are understandably loath to call on a colleague to give up a source who's been promised anonymity, as the credibility of the entire profession can suffer from such a public betrayal. The point is not the principle per se; it is the principle's pragmatic value in the daily exchange of information between journalist and source. Many such exchanges would not be possible, as the profession is currently practiced, without the guarantee that a source's name not be used. (Yes, the promise of anonymity is too promiscuously proffered, but that's another matter.)

In most cases the decision to stick to this rule is—from the standpoint of self-interest at least—a no-brainer. Only when the interests of national safety or simple morality are so compelling as to be overwhelming would any professional journalist consider calling on a colleague to weaken this guarantee.

Enter Robert Novak. The conservative pundit knowingly blew CIA agent Valerie Plame's cover, and possibly aided and abetted the commission of a felony by a White House official who leaked him the information. In any case, he undoubtedly cost the agency a fortune by forcing it to retrace the steps of Plame's career and attempt to contain, if not redress, the damage. Operations would have to be rolled up; agents relocated; investments destroyed and, for all Novak may have known, lives endangered. As Murray Waas reported in *The American Prospect*, Novak was asked specifically not to publish Plame's name because "he might potentially jeopardize her ability to engage in covert work, stymie ongoing intelligence operations and jeopardize sensitive overseas sources."

Novak's action served no patriotic purpose. Plame was not accused, or even suspected, of engaging in any form of illegal or immoral activity. There was no rogue CIA operation to be exposed or any compelling national interest to be protected. Novak was one of six journalists contacted by the White House in an attempt to weaken the credibility of Plame's husband, Joseph Wilson, and punish his act of dissent, but Novak was the only patsy who took the bait.

Almost no one in the press wants to see Novak legally compelled to name his source, but a number of journalists—including, most prominently, Geneva Overholser, former editor of the *Des Moines Register* and former *Washington Post* columnist and ombudsman—have called on Novak to fess up on his own. National Society of Newspaper Columnists president Mike Leonard, a columnist for the *Herald-Times* of Bloomington, Indiana, speaking to *Editor & Publisher*, agrees, explaining, "Novak was either used or was a willing accomplice to a felony. Other journalists were also fed the same information, and they had the integrity not to run with the information. I've still never heard an explanation from Novak that makes sense." Novak, we may note, has in fact revealed the name of an anonymous source once before—that of Russian spy Robert Hanssen. He also once told me he "admired" US officials who used him to lie to his readers. In other words, he is less a real "reporter" than a committed right-wing hack who plays one on TV. Still, given the precedent, it's not an easy call. An easier one would be that his ass should be out the door in any self-respecting journalistic establishment, lest anyone get the idea that such behavior is condoned.

Of course, neither CNN, where he seems to appear every ten minutes, nor any newspaper that carries him—including most particularly the *Washington Post*—has gone so far as even to reprimand Novak. The *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, going farther off the deep end than usual, suspects an ideological conspiracy in the mere existence of debate. The editors attacked Leonard for allegedly harboring a double standard because he has criticized Novak's actions and the Patriot Act for its "heavy-handed assaults on free speech." The audacity of that accusation leaves one's mouth agape. Do the *Journal* editors really fail to understand the difference between criticism of Novak's unpatriotic and immoral outing of Plame and criticism of the Patriot Act's unwarranted expansion of police power? Naturally, they blame "liberal bias," as if no one in his or her right mind could possibly have any concern about the damage Novak did to what they almost mockingly term national security. They also ignore the fact that of those journalists surveyed by *Editor & Publisher*, the vast majority supported Novak's unwillingness to name his source, even though many if not most were highly critical of his ethics in using the information to flame Plame.

Although journalistic liberalism is now widely understood to be a myth, conservatives seem to think they can trot out the charge on behalf of their cause no matter how transparently polemical their intention or the accusation. Not only do the *Journal* editors sound as if they're channeling Philip Agee, but right-wing rumormongers—including Rush Limbaugh, Matt Drudge, Andrew Sullivan and David Frum—are whining that the dreaded "liberal bias" disease has prevented most of the mass media from following them into the gutter this one time by retailing unproven and apparently untrue allegations about John Kerry and an intern. Offering a lesson on the inner workings of the right-wing media food chain, Limbaugh complained, "It's all over the UK press! It's front page!" He was referring to Rupert Murdoch's titty tabloid, the *Sun*, which picked up on false rumors trumpeted by Drudge.

That's where we've landed: It's OK to reveal national security secrets but wrong not to print lies about candidates' sex lives. One almost gets the impression that conservatives are not really serious about media criticism and see it merely as a stick with which to beat back criticism of their own hypocrisy.

Personal Ad Space: The paperback edition of *What Liberal Media? The Truth About Bias and the News*, was just released by Basic Books, with a new preface and long new chapter on Iraq war coverage; fewer typos, too. Look for it next to *The Book on Bush: How George W. (Mis)Leads America*, just out from Viking. ■

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ARTICLES

WHAT'S RIGHT WITH KERRY

by DAVID CORN

In the heat of battle, with his campaign crumbling, Howard Dean lashed out at John Kerry. First, he called the leader in the Democratic presidential race a "Republican." Then he said, "When Senator Kerry's record is examined by the public at a more leisurely time...he's going to turn out to be just like George Bush."

Just like George Bush? It is true that Kerry, another Yalie and Skull and Bones alum, has voted in favor of NAFTA and other corporate-friendly trade pacts, that he once raised questions about affirmative action (while still supporting it), that he has, like almost every Democratic senator, accepted contributions from special-interest lobbyists (while being one of the few to eschew political action committee donations), that he voted to grant Bush the authority to invade Iraq. But this hardly makes him Bush lite. There is, as evidence, his nineteen-year Senate record, during which he has voted consistently in favor of abortion rights and environmental policies, opposed Bush's tax cuts for the wealthy, led the effort against drilling in the Alaskan wilderness, pushed for higher fuel economy standards, advocated boosting the minimum wage and pressed for global warming remedies. But what distinguishes Kerry's career are key moments when he displayed guts and took tough actions that few colleagues would imitate. One rap on Kerry is that he is overly cautious and conventional. He's no firebrand on the stump, nor does he come across as the most passionate and exciting force for change. But his history in Washington includes episodes in which he demonstrated a willingness to confront hard issues, to challenge power, to pursue values rather than political advantage, to take risks for the public interest.

Kerry arrived in the Senate in 1985. This Vietnam War hero turned antiwar leader had been lieutenant governor of Massachusetts. But he entered the body more as the prosecutor he had been in the late 1970s after graduating from Boston College law school. In early 1986 Kerry's office was contacted by a Vietnam vet who alleged that the support network for the CIA-backed Nicaraguan *contras* (who were fighting against the socialist Sandinistas in power) was linked to drug traffickers. Kerry doubted that the Reagan Administration, obsessed with supporting the *contras*, would investigate such charges. He pushed for a Senate inquiry and a year later, as chairman of a Foreign Relations subcommittee, obtained approval to conduct a probe.

It was not an easy ride. Reagan Justice Department officials sought to discredit and stymie his investigation. Republicans dismissed it. One anti-Kerry effort used falsified affidavits to make it seem his staff had bribed witnesses. The Democratic staff of the Senate Iran/*contra* committee—which showed little interest in the *contra* drug connection—often refused to cooperate. "They were fighting us tooth and nail," recalls Jack Blum, one of Kerry's investigators. "We had the White House and the CIA against us on one side and our colleagues in the Senate on the other. But Kerry told us, 'Keep going.' He didn't let this stuff faze him."

Kerry's inquiry widened to look at Cuba, Haiti, the Bahamas, Honduras and Panama. In 1989 he released a report that slammed the Reagan Administration for neglecting or undermining anti-drug efforts in order to pursue other foreign policy objectives. It noted that the government in the 1970s and '80s had "turned a blind eye" to the corruption and drug dealing of Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, who had done various favors for Washington (including assisting the *contras*). The report concluded that "individuals who provided support for the contras were involved in drug trafficking...and elements of the contras themselves knowingly received financial and material assistance from drug traffickers." And, it added, US government agencies—meaning

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the CIA and the State Department—had known this.

This was a rather explosive finding, but the Kerry report did not provoke much uproar in the media, and the Democratic leadership on Capitol Hill did little to support Kerry and keep the matter alive. His critics derided him as a conspiracy buff. Yet a decade later the CIA inspector general released a pair of reports that acknowledged that the agency had worked with suspected drug smugglers to support the *contras*. Kerry had been right.

After the *contra* investigation, Kerry next turned to a far more sensitive target: a bank connected to a prominent Democratic Party fundraiser. During their investigation of Noriega, Kerry's staff discovered that the Bank of Credit and Commerce International had facilitated Noriega's drug trafficking and money laundering. This led to an inquiry into BCCI, a worldwide but murky institution more or less controlled by the ruling family of Abu Dhabi. BCCI was a massive criminal enterprise, although this was not yet publicly known. It had engaged in rampant fraud and money laundering (to help out, among others, drug dealers, terrorists and arms traffickers) around the world. Its tentacles ran everywhere. Its political connections reached around the globe. Jimmy Carter and Henry Kissinger both became involved in the scandal. When banking regulators finally shut down BCCI in 1991, an estimated 250,000 creditors and depositors from forty countries were out billions of dollars.

Former GOP Senator Hank Brown said most Democrats didn't want to probe BCCI because party VIPs were involved. 'John Kerry did.'

One key issue was whether BCCI had secretly and illegally acquired control of First American bank in Washington, DC. The top officials of First American were Clark Clifford, a longtime Democratic graybeard and a party fundraiser, and Robert Altman, his protégé. Democratic senators grumbled about Kerry's crusade, which put Clifford in the cross-hairs. "This really pissed people off," Blum says. BCCI hired from both Democratic and Republican quarters an army of lawyers, PR specialists and lobbyists (including former members of Congress) to thwart the investigation. The Justice Department of the first Bush Administration did not respond to information on BCCI uncovered by Kerry's staff. So Blum took the material to New York District Attorney Robert Morgenthau, who then commenced an investigation of BCCI that led to indictments. And Kerry again found himself tussling with the CIA, for the agency had been using the services of BCCI even after it had learned that the bank was crooked and in league with terrorists (including Abu Nidal).

In the fall of 1992 Kerry released a report on the BCCI affair. It blasted everyone: Justice, Treasury, US Customs, the Federal Reserve, Clifford and Altman (for participating in "some of BCCI's deceptions"), high-level lobbyists and fixers, and the CIA. The report noted that after the CIA knew the bank was "a fundamentally corrupt criminal enterprise, it continued to use both BCCI and First American...for CIA operations." The report was, in a sense, an indictment of Washington cronyism. In the years since, there's been nothing like it. Senator Hank Brown, the ranking Republican on Kerry's subcommittee, noted, "John Kerry was willing to spearhead this difficult investigation. Because many important members of his own party were involved in this scandal, it was a distasteful subject for other committee and subcommittee chairmen to investigate. They did not. John Kerry did."

While Kerry was in the middle of the BCCI muck, Senate majority leader George Mitchell asked him to assume another difficult task: investigate the unaccounted-for Vietnam POWs and MIAs. For years so-called POW advocates, like billionaire Ross Perot, had claimed American GIs were still being held in Vietnam, and the highly charged POW/MIA issue was the main roadblock to normalizing relations. Working closely with Senator John McCain, a Republican who had been a POW, Kerry got the Pentagon to declassify 1 million pages of records. His committee chased after rumors of American soldiers being held. He took fourteen trips to Vietnam. This was a hard mission: How could his committee say there were absolutely no POWs still captive in Vietnam? Yet anything less could keep the POW controversy alive.

On one trip to Hanoi, as Douglas Brinkley notes in *Tour of Duty: John Kerry and the Vietnam War*, Kerry insisted that he be allowed to inspect the catacombs beneath Ho Chi Minh's tomb, where, according to a persistent rumor, the remaining POWs were being held. Permission was granted, and with conservative Republican Bob Smith by his side, he inspected the tunnels and found no signs of POWs. In January 1993 Kerry's POW/MIA committee released a 1,223-page report concluding that there was "no compelling evidence that proves any American remains alive in captivity in Southeast Asia." Some POW die-hards howled. (Journalist Sydney Schanberg has accused Kerry of covering up and destroying evidence that POWs were left behind.) But the report mostly settled the issue. President Bill Clinton was able to drop the Vietnam trade embargo and normalize relations.

Investigations were not the only notable moments in Kerry's Senate career. On September 10, 1996, as he was in a tight reelection contest against William Weld, the popular Republican governor of Massachusetts, Kerry voted against the Defense of Marriage Act, which would deny federal benefits to same-sex couples and permit states to not recognize same-sex marriages conducted in other states. He was one of only fourteen senators to oppose the measure. Several leading Senate liberals—including Paul Wellstone, Tom Harkin and Pat Leahy—had voted for it. But on the floor of the Senate that day, Kerry, who noted that he did not support same-sex marriage, said, "I am going to vote against this bill...because I believe that this debate is fundamentally ugly, and it is fundamentally political." He refused to pretend that the bill was not a wedge-issue trap devised by conservative Republicans. The legislation, he charged, was "meant to divide Americans," and he argued fiercely that it was unconstitutional. "If this were truly a defense of marriage act," he said, "it would expand the learning experience for would-be husbands and wives. It would provide for counseling for all troubled marriages, not just for those who can afford it. It would provide treatment on demand for those with alcohol and substance abuse.... It would guarantee daycare for every family that struggles and needs it."

The following year, a re-elected Kerry was in another lonely position as one of only five original sponsors of the Clean Money, Clean Elections Act, to provide for full public financing of Con-

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gressional elections. The measure would remove practically all special-interest money from House and Senate campaigns. (Kerry's colleagues were Wellstone, Leahy, John Glenn and Joe Biden—all Democrats.) "Kerry was totally into it," says Ellen Miller, former executive director of Public Campaign, a reform group pressing for the legislation. "He believes in this stuff."

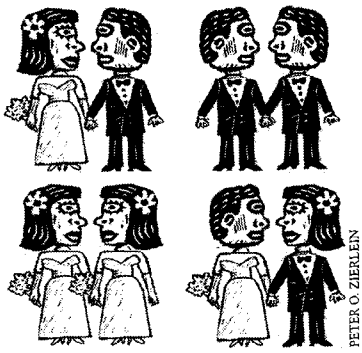
In introducing the legislation, Kerry said on the Senate floor, "Special interest money is moving and dictating and governing the agenda of American politics.... If we want to regain the respect and confidence of the American people, and if we want to reconnect to them and reconnect them to our democracy, we have to get the special interest money out of politics." He was also a backer of the better-known McCain-Feingold legislation, a more modest and (some might say) problematic approach to campaign reform. But over the years he's pointed to the Clean Money, Clean Elections Act as the real reform. "It is a tough position in Congress to be for dramatic change in financing elections," says Miller. "It's gutsy to go out and say, 'Let's provide a financially leveled playing field so there is more competition for incumbents.' Kerry and Wellstone were the leaders and took a giant step. It was remarkable."

After two decades in the Senate, Kerry has a long record that can be picked apart by competitors within his own party as well as in the GOP. And though he has been re-elected three times, he has not developed the best political skills. He has not shed a manner too easily criticized as aloof or patrician. He has had brushes with smarmy campaign financing. But there have been times he has shown courage, devotion to justice and commitment to honesty, open government and principle-over-politics. There are few senators of whom that can be said. A full assessment of the man ought to take these portions of his public service into account. ■

AS POLITICIANS SQUARE OFF ON GAY MARRIAGE, PROGRESSIVES MUST ENTER THE DEBATE.

Holy Matrimony!

LISA DUGGAN


PETER O. ZIERLEIN

The political storm over marriage is now intensifying as gay couples wed in San Francisco and President Bush vows to stop them with a constitutional amendment. Gay marriage threatens to wreak havoc as a "wedge issue" in the November elections, but it isn't entirely clear which party's prospects will be promoted, and which damaged, through marriage politics this year. Progressives certainly haven't figured out how best to enter the contentious and confusing public debate. Widespread anxiety over changing demographics and contested social norms is producing the background noise for a relatively volatile political calculus on all sides.

If Britney Spears's high-speed annulment and the competitive gold-digging with a sucker punch on TV's *Joe Millionaire* are any indication, concern over the state of the marital union is justified. Statistics confirm what entertainment culture spectacularizes—marriage is less stable and central to the organization of American life than ever. There are now more unmarried households than married ones, and a variety of formal and informal, permanent and transient, solemn and casual partnership and kinship arrangements have displaced any singular, static model of domestic life. Political responses to these changes have long been polarized between those who want to bring back Ozzie and Harriet and those who are fighting for the democratization of state recognition of households, along with equitable distribution of services and benefits to Americans, based on how we actually live rather than on some imagined, lost ideal. But today, in part because of the public's own ambivalence, the major political parties have been reluctant to come down firmly on either side of this divide.

What is most vexing the political parties right now is same-sex marriage. The Republican electoral alliance is split on this issue. On the one hand, hard-line religious and moral conservatives have been working to rigidify the boundaries of "traditional" marriage and to shore up its privileged status. These groups are now pushing to pass a constitutional amendment defining marriage as between "a man and a woman." On the other hand, libertarians, states' rights advocates and social moderates prefer to retain conventional gendered marriage but support allowing some diversification of forms of partnership and household recognition at the state level. They oppose a constitutional amendment as a federal imposition on the states, or as just too mean to help Republicans during an election year. The religious and moral right appears to be winning out in the wake of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court's decision that the state must extend civil marriage to same-sex couples. Bush, however grudgingly, fulfilled his promise to the Christian right when he announced on February 24 that he will support a federal marriage amendment.

With their convention in Boston, and Massachusetts Senator John Kerry the likely presidential nominee, Democrats will be fighting any "too liberal" charge associated with gay weddings by noting their opposition to same-sex marriage (the only remaining candidates who support it are Al Sharpton and Dennis Kucinich), while opposing a federal marriage amendment and emphasizing support for civil unions and domestic partnerships. Their carefully calibrated rhetoric will urge tolerance without questioning the supremacy of married, two-parent families. Indeed, the Bush

Lisa Duggan is the author of The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy *(Beacon). She teaches queer studies in the American studies program and the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality at NYU.*

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Administration's recent proposal to spend $1.5 billion promoting marriage, "especially" among low-income populations, has not encountered energetic opposition from many Democrats, who have supported like-minded efforts in the past. Progressives, meanwhile, are struggling to articulate a small-d democratic politics of marriage that demands full equality for lesbians and gays without accepting the logic of the "family values" crowd.

It may be tempting to see this squabble as an example of symbolic politics, with the debate over the future of marriage potentially displacing bigger and more significant battles over war and peace, taxes and fairness, corporate greed and good government. But state regulation of households and partnerships does in fact affect the basic safety, prosperity, equality and welfare of all Americans—it determines who will make medical decisions for us in emergencies, who may share our pensions or Social Security benefits, who may legally co-parent our children and much more. It's just hard to sort out the real issues from the smokescreens as the rhetoric heats up this election year.

It's tempting to see this squabble as an example of symbolic politics, but state regulation of households affects the welfare of all Americans.

Moral conservatives have so far taken the lead in the struggle to frame the meaning of the "marriage crisis." In their apocalyptic imagination, the stability of heterosexual unions and the social order they insure are threatened on all sides—by the specter of gay marriage, by women's independent choices within and outside marriage, and by government neutrality, toleration or support of single-parent and unmarried households, especially among the poor. But wait! It gets worse: As Stanley Kurtz argued in *The Weekly Standard* last August, "Among the likeliest effects of gay marriage is to take us down a slippery slope to legalized polygamy and 'polyamory' (group marriage). Marriage will be transformed into a variety of relationship contracts, linking two, three, or more individuals (however weakly and temporarily) in every conceivable combination of male and female."

I'm not sure, given the rise of transgender activism, just how many combinations there are of male and female. But the dystopic vision is clear. Moral conservatives want to prevent courts and legislatures from opening a Pandora's box of legal options—a flexible menu of choices for forms of household and partnership recognition open to all citizens, depending on specific and varying needs. Such a menu would threaten the normative status of the nuclear family, undermining state endorsement of heterosexual privilege, the male "headed" household and "family values" moralism as social welfare policy.

The problem is not that any such flexible menu is currently available anywhere at present. What has emerged over decades of political wrangling at the municipal and state level is a hodgepodge of legal categories—civil marriage, civil union (with the same state-level benefits as civil marriage but without the portability from state to state, or federal recognition), domestic partnership (with fewer benefits than civil marriage) and reciprocal beneficiaries (which carries the fewest benefits). The categories are neither equivalent nor open to all. Civil marriage, thus far (and until May in Massachusetts) open only to one man and one woman who are not close blood relatives, carries the most specific benefits and mutual responsibilities (more than 1,049 automatic federal and additional state protections, benefits and responsibilities, according to the federal government's General Accounting Office). It endows couples and their children with both real and symbolic citizenship rights at the highest level. Civil union (in Vermont) or domestic partnership (in five states and over sixty municipalities) has been made available to gay and lesbian couples and sometimes to heterosexual couples who choose not to marry (or not to have to divorce) as well. Only the reciprocal beneficiaries status has been available (in different versions in Hawaii and Vermont) to close relatives, or those with no proclaimed conjugal bond. It has so far provided the most limited benefits, but it is in some senses the most radical innovation. It potentially separates state recognition of households or partnerships from the business of sexual regulation altogether.

The right wing's fear of a "slippery slope" suggests some ways that this eclectic array of statuses might move us in a progressive direction. Kurtz himself, citing Brigham Young University professor Alan Hawkins, sketches out what is to him a distasteful scenario:

> Consider the plight of an underemployed and uninsured single mother in her early 30s who sees little real prospect of marriage (to a man) in her future. Suppose she has a good friend, also female and heterosexual, who is single and childless but employed with good spousal benefits. Sooner or later, friends like this are going to start contracting same-sex marriages of convenience. The single mom will get medical and governmental benefits, will share her friend's paycheck, and will gain an additional caretaker for the kids besides. Her friend will gain companionship and a family life. The marriage would obviously be sexually open. And if lightning struck and the right man came along for one of the women, they could always divorce and marry heterosexually.
>
> In a narrow sense, the women and children in this arrangement would be better off. Yet the larger effects of such unions on the institution of marriage would be devastating. At a stroke, marriage would be severed not only from the complementarity of the sexes but also from its connection to romance and sexual exclusivity—and even from the hope of permanence.

Gee. Sounds good. Then consider how such arrangements might benefit women, children and others even more substantially. What if there were a way to separate the tax advantages of joint household recognition, or the responsibilities of joint parenting, from the next-of-kin recognition so that such rights might go to a non-co-resident relative, a friend or a lover? And what if many benefits, such as health insurance, could be available to all without regard for household or partnership status? The moral conservative's nightmare vision of a flexible menu of options might become a route to progressive equality! That could happen—*if* all statuses could be opened to all without exclusions, allowing different kinds of households to fit state benefits to their changing needs; *if* no status conferred any invidious privilege or advantage over any other, or over none at all; and *if* material benefits such as health insurance were detached from partnership

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or household form altogether (federally guaranteed universal healthcare, for instance, would be far more democratic and egalitarian than health insurance as a partnership benefit). Meanwhile, the "sanctity" of traditional marriages could be retained and honored by religious groups and families, according to their own values and definitions.

Efforts to stop any such democratization of households have escalated steadily ever since a Hawaii state court decision conjured up visions of legitimate gay weddings in 1993. Thirty-eight states have passed legislation or constitutional amendments restricting marriage to heterosexual couples. In 1996 Bill Clinton signed the federal Defense of Marriage Act, designed to prevent any future state-level same-sex marriages from carrying the federal recognition and portability that civil marriage has so far guaranteed (though many believe DOMA is vulnerable to constitutional challenge). The proposed federal marriage amendment, with more than a hundred sponsors in the House and a handful of supporters in the Senate so far, would go much further than DOMA to write marriage restriction into the Constitution. Depending on the final wording, and the results of inevitable litigation over its interpretation, the amendment might also put a stop not solely to gay marriage but to all diversification of partnership and household recognition. In one stroke all the hard-won civil union, domestic partnership and reciprocal beneficiary statuses could be wiped off the books, leaving civil marriage, restricted to heterosexual couples, as the sole form of recognition available at the federal, state or municipal level (and possibly at private businesses and organizations as well) throughout the country.

The campaign to preserve gendered marriage has some rational basis, for neoliberals in both parties, as a politics of privatization.

Fortunately for advocates of partnership and household diversity, a marriage amendment faces a long, steep uphill battle as supporters struggle to pass it, first in Congress and then in three-fourths of the state legislatures, before it can become law. Many conservatives are clearly leery of the expensive, acrimonious battle ahead. George W. Bush withheld his own endorsement of the amendment until after his State of the Union address, in which he chose to emphasize his plan to promote conventional marriage instead.

To many, this looked like election-year strategy—an effort to pander to moral conservatives without giving them the explicit approval they craved. And surely such tactical concerns are shaping every word uttered by Bush on this issue. But it would be a mistake to attribute this Administration's interest in marriage promotion solely to such motives. There is a deeper commitment to preserving gendered marriage, on economic as well as moral grounds.

Bush's marriage-promotion initiative isn't new; it first appeared in the welfare reauthorization legislation passed by the House two years ago, which is now before the Senate and may come up for a vote as soon as this spring. Bush's $1.5 billion package, to be used to hire counselors and offer classes in marital harmony, extends the commitment contained in the 1996 welfare "reform" bill, passed under Clinton, to "end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting...marriage." Women and children, in other words, should depend on men for basic economic support, while women care for dependents—children, elderly parents, disabled family members, etc. Under such a model, married-couple households might "relieve" the state of the expense of helping to support single-parent households, and of the cost of a wide range of social services, from childcare and disability services to home nursing. Marriage thus becomes a privatization scheme: Individual married-couple-led households give women and children access to higher men's wages, and also "privately" provide many services once offered through social welfare agencies. More specifically, the unpaid labor of married women fills the gap created by government service cuts.

Besides being sexist and outdated, this model of marriage is not exactly realistic. Relatively few men today earn a "family wage," and employed married women are not able to care fully for dependents by themselves. Marriage promotion, moreover, has not proven an effective means of alleviating poverty and reducing the need for government benefits. But even without any measurable economic impact, the effort to promote marriage among low-income populations works at the rhetorical level to shift blame for economic hardship onto the marital practices of the poor rather than on the loss of jobs, employment benefits or government services.

Republicans and Democrats are by and large in agreement that as social programs are whittled away, gender-differentiated marriage (heterosexual, with different expectations for women and men) should take up the slack. Clinton's marriage-promoting welfare law embodied this principle, which also helps to explain the ambivalence of conservative and centrist Democrats toward genuine gender equality in marriage (illustrated in the retro discussion of the proper role of political wives in the current presidential campaign) and their opposition to gay marriage. So there is an economic agenda, as well as surface moralism, attached to calls for the preservation of traditional marriage. The campaign to save gendered marriage has some rational basis, for neoliberals in both parties, as a politics of privatization.

Unwilling to support gay marriage, defend Judith Steinberg's remote relation to her husband's now-defunct presidential campaign (though Laura Bush did so) or openly attack marriage promotion as public policy, the Democrats are left with lame advocacy of second-class status for gays, mandatory secondary supportive roles for political wives and public silence about welfare policy. No viable Democratic candidate has yet been able to shift the frame of reference to escape a weakly defensive posture on these issues. So it's left to progressives, both within the Democratic Party and outside it, to formulate a clear, positive vision of how best to address the needs of real households for state recognition and social support.

But progressives are divided, too, in their approach to marriage politics. The hateful campaign to exclude same-sex couples from full marriage rights creates tremendous pressure on gay-rights advocates and supporters to emphasize access to civil marriage as a core right of citizenship. A few marriage-equality

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This is One of the Sights the Governor of Alaska Doesn't Want Visitors to See

Since January, many wolves have been killed in a state-sponsored aerial shooting program still underway in Alaska. The state has issued permits to private hunter-pilot teams to massacre all the wolves in several areas for at least two to three years. Hundreds could be chased and shot this year and more over the next several years in an accelerated wolf-killing program—a practice revived after Governor Frank Murkowski took office last year, and appointed six of the seven Game Board members. Shooting wolves to suit the convenience of moose hunters, and to provide a thrill for pilots, is a national disgrace.

William Rideg

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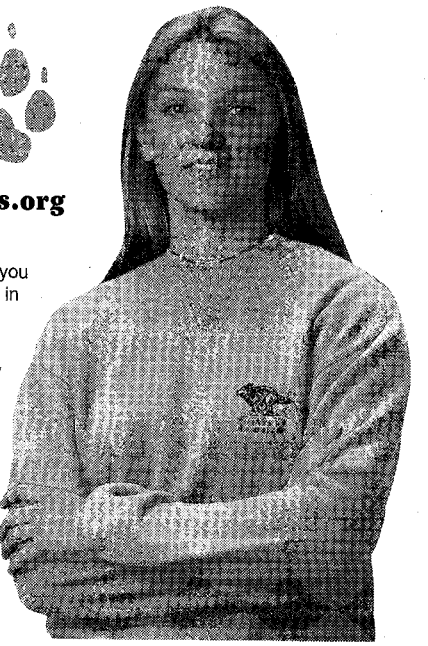

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advocates have continued to call for the multiplication of democratically accessible forms of state recognition for households and partnerships, and for the dethronement of sanctified marriage as privileged civic status, but many have couched their advocacy in language that glorifies marital bliss, sometimes echoing the "family values" rhetoric of their opponents. The "Roadmap to Equality: A Freedom to Marry Educational Guide," published by Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund and Marriage Equality California, begins with the kind of banal American Dream rhetoric that appeals to some gay people, but misdescribes, annoys and even stigmatizes many others:

> Gay people are very much like everyone else. They grow up, fall in love, form families and have children. They mow their lawns, shop for groceries and worry about making ends meet. They want good schools for their children, and security for their families as a whole.

The guide goes on to recycle some of the more noxious views routinely spouted by conservative moralists:

> Denying marriage rights to lesbian and gay couples keeps them in a state of permanent adolescence.... Both legally and socially, married couples are held in greater esteem than unmarried couples because of the commitment they have made in a serious, public, legally enforceable manner. For lesbian and gay couples who wish to make that very same commitment, the very same option must be available. There is no other way for gay people to be fully equal to non-gay people.

No other way? How about abolishing state endorsement of the sanctified religious wedding or ending the use of the term "marriage" altogether (as lesbian and gay progressives and queer leftists have advocated for decades)? In a bid for equality, some gay groups are producing rhetoric that insults and marginalizes unmarried people, while promoting marriage in much the same terms as the welfare reformers use to stigmatize single-parent households, divorce and "out of wedlock" births. If pursued in this way, the drive for gay-marriage equality can undermine rather than support the broader movement for social justice and democratic diversity.

Meanwhile, critics of marriage promotion, located primarily in feminist policy and research organizations, are working to counter rosy views of the institution of marriage. The National Organization for Women's Legal Defense and Education Fund has documented the planned flow of money and services away from poor women and children and toward conservative organizations, contained in the proposed welfare reauthorization bill (see www.nowldef.org). A group of academic researchers and professors organized by Anna Marie Smith of Cornell University, Martha Albertson Fineman of Emory University and Gwendolyn Mink of Smith College have created a website to circulate critiques of marriage promotion as a substitute for effective social welfare programs (http://falcon.arts.cornell.edu/ams3/npmbasis.html). As they point out, "While marriage has provided some women the cushion of emotional and economic security, it also has locked many women in unsatisfying, exploitative, abusive and even violent relationships." Their research findings and legislative analysis demonstrate that "federal and state governments are transforming the burden of caring for our needy sisters and brothers into a private obligation."

The agendas of lesbian and gay marriage–equality advocates and progressive feminist critics of marriage promotion don't necessarily or inevitably conflict, though their efforts are currently running on separate political and rhetorical tracks. Given the rising political stakes, and the narrow horizons of political possibility, it seems imperative now that progressives find ways to make room for a more integrated, broadly democratic marriage politics. To respond to widespread changes in household organization and incipient dissatisfaction with the marital status quo, progressives could begin to disentangle the religious, symbolic, kinship and economic functions of marriage, making a case for both civil equality and the separation of church and state. They could argue that civil marriage (perhaps renamed or reconfigured), like any other household status, should be open to all who are willing to make the trek to city hall, whether or not they also choose to seek a church's blessing. Beginning with the imperfect menu of household and partnership statuses now unevenly available from state to state, it might not be such an impossibly utopian leap to suggest that we should expand and democratize what we've already got, rather than contract our options.

Such a vision, long advocated by feminist and queer progressives, may now be finding some broader support. Kay Whitlock, the national representative for LGBT issues for the American Friends Service Committee, circulated a statement at the National Religious Leadership Roundtable last fall that argued, "We cannot speak about equal civil marriage rights and the discrimination that currently exists without also speaking of the twin evil of coercive marriage policies promoted with federal dollars.... For us, it is critical that the LGBT movement work for equal civil marriage rights in ways that do not further reinforce the idea that if a couple is married, they are more worthy of rights and recognition than people involved in intimate relationships who are not married." The statement continued, "We do not want to convey the message that marriage is what all queer people should aspire to. We also do not want the discussion of marriage to overwhelm and suppress discussion about a broader definition of human rights and basic benefits that ought to accompany those rights."

This seems like a good place to start. The question is, How can arguments like this be heard in the midst of the clamor against gay marriage on the right, when Democrats are reduced to a timid whisper and gay groups are too often sounding like the American Family Association? Might it be possible to tap into an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the current state of the marital union—and appeal to the public's understanding of the enormous distance between rhetoric and reality on this subject? Politicians pay lip service to conservative family values, but voters do not always bolt when their actual lives fail to conform to the prescriptions—as Bill Clinton's enduring popularity despite repeated sex scandals demonstrated. Polls show widely contradictory public views on the subjects of marriage and divorce, adultery and gay rights. Questions with only slight wording changes can yield widely differing results. Why not muster the courage to lead the public a little on this issue? Civil unions, considered beyond the pale only a few years ago, are now

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supported by many conservatives. The political center can and does shift—and right now, it is particularly fluid and volatile in this area.

In the current climate, progressives might profit by pointing out the multiple ways that conservative marriage politics aim to limit freedom in the most intimate aspects of our lives—through banning gay marriage as well as promoting traditional marriage. Given current demographic trends, it couldn't hurt to ask: Why do Republicans want to turn back the clock, rather than accept reality? And why can't Democrats find some way to support law and policy that advances the goals of intimate freedom and political equality, even during an election year? ■

Letter From Paris

by Maria Margaronis

For several months now France has been obsessed with an item of women's clothing. The garment in question is not the skimpy lingerie modeled in a Paris Metro ad by a pubescent girl (*paedophilie publicitaire*, scolds the graffiti) but the Islamic hijab, increasingly in vogue among French Muslim women.

To Americans and Britons used to a more laissez-faire approach to multiculturalism, the French Parliament's recent vote (by 494 to 36) to ban the wearing of "conspicuous" religious symbols in public schools may seem perverse. (The ban will apply to yarmulkes and large crucifixes as well as the hijab, but no one is taken in by this apparent evenhandedness.) Yet similar laws are being discussed in Belgium and the Netherlands; Germany's highest court has ruled that states can ban teachers from wearing the hijab; and in Luton, near London, a 15-year-old Muslim girl is hiring lawyers because she can't go to school in her jilbab, a long robe she feels expresses her spiritual commitment. Europe's anxieties about immigration and a spreading Islamic revival have found a rich metaphor in this polymorphous piece of cloth, which can be read at once as a cover for inaccessible mysteries, an assertion of Islamic identity or an instrument of women's oppression.

The French law is meant to protect the republican principle of *laïcité*, a strict form of secularism established after bitter struggles at the beginning of the last century to keep the Catholic Church out of politics. Nearly everyone agrees that *laïcité* must be preserved—including most of the far right, who take the Catholic jihadi Joan of Arc as figurehead for their anti-immigrant campaign. At a moment of perceived crisis, it is a powerful rallying cry. Exactly what the crisis is depends on whom you ask.

France's Muslims, most of them children of its colonial adventures in North Africa, make up about 7 percent of the population; no government has challenged the racism that keeps so many of them in the wind-swept, highrise suburbs (the *banlieues*) on the margins of the cities. A second-generation Algerian is three to four times more likely to be unemployed than a "native" French person; schools in the *banlieues* are bleak and badly funded, experienced by teachers and students as the front line of confrontation. The rise of the far right's Jean-Marie Le Pen is one consequence of this: President Jacques Chirac, who was re-elected in 2002 on the back of Le Pen's success against the Socialists, is mindful both of his debt to his onetime ally and of the threat he represents. (Le Pen is cleverly against the hijab ban, on the grounds that it will help the immigrants blend in.) From the other side, French Muslims are beginning to demand political representation. There are no North African deputies in the French National Assembly and only seven on local and regional councils. A few days after the headscarf vote, a group of Maghrebis from Chirac's own party threatened to quit politics because they are so underrepresented on the lists for March's regional elections. Meanwhile, as in the rest of Europe, more Muslims are choosing to express their identity through an Islamic consciousness, religious or political or both. Teachers have complained about requests from Muslim girls to be excused from biology, PE or co-ed swimming; anger with Israel has morphed into anti-Semitism in the schoolyard and the street. And there's an election coming, with Chirac's close ally Alain Juppé convicted in a corruption scandal and his tough law-and-order interior minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, increasingly setting the agenda.

In spite of all this, I went to Paris unsure what I thought about the hijab ban. My instincts were against it, because it infringes personal freedom; it stigmatizes Muslims; it will keep girls who choose the scarf from experimenting and give it the glamour of forbidden fruit; it may push those forced to wear it into religious schools. Besides, it seems absurd to legislate how teenagers should dress. But viewed from Britain, where the government would like more faith-based schools, *laïcité* seems worth defending tooth and claw. And, from the outside (maybe the inside, too), the difference between a headscarf worn by choice and one put on because a parent or imam insists isn't always easy to discern.

In Britain, Muslim women say that the hijab liberates them (from men's predatory gaze, from sexism, from the pressures of consumer culture); that it keeps them mindful of their spiritual journey; that it expresses an identity they feel is under threat; or simply that it's part of who they are. But at a small demonstration in London against the French law, among the students and solicitors arguing for tolerance and democracy, I also met a veiled child of 9 who said that women wear the hijab "so men don't look at us because of our looks, so we don't have people stealing parts of our bodies." The women of the Islamic Forum Europe were kept separate from the men, who told them where to stand and what to chant. Azam Kamguian, who was tortured in Iran and chairs the Committee to Defend Women's Rights in the Middle East, argues that the French ban will give such women a vital hijab-free space—that it is the Islamists who suppress freedom of

Maria Margaronis writes from The Nation*'s London bureau.*

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Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis are longstanding *Nation* readers.

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dress, and that veiling children takes away their childhood: "I hate this multiculturalism, this ghettoizing. It's reverse racism in the guise of respect. It's patronizing."

At the Holiday Inn on the Place de la République, under the secular gaze of the statue of Marianne, Kamguian's friend Samia Labidi agrees. According to a poll reported in *The Economist*, 49 percent of Muslim women in France favor the ban, as do some prominent feminists and most of the left, apart from the Greens and some Communists. Several Muslim women joined a petition supporting the law in *Elle* magazine; Labidi says women like these are the silent majority, marginalized by media that feed on conflict and ethnic stereotypes. Raised in Tunisia, she wore the hijab from the age of 10, when her sister's fundamentalist husband brought religion into the family. She remembers how hard it was to take it off: "The veil completely changes the way you feel. You act differently. It's not a detail."

Labidi believes fervently in a secular, integrated Muslim community as the only barrier against the Islamism she says is spreading like wildfire. She is furious with the government for setting up, last year, the French Council of the Muslim Religion to represent North Africans (and to contain Muslim aspirations): In contravention of *laïcité*, the council is a state-funded religious body elected through the mosques. But though she speaks from personal experience and has published a book about her brother's life among the fundamentalists, I can't quite trust the panic in her vision of Islamist revolutionaries fanning out through France. She tells me she doesn't choose to speak in the *banlieues*; when I name the neighborhood I'm going to next she warns me that it's full of Islamist bookshops and purveyors of Mecca Cola, the brand that gives some profits to Palestinian charities.

'The veil completely changes the way you feel. You act differently. It's not a detail.'
—Samia Labidi

As it turns out, Belleville feels much like Brooklyn. From a Neapolitan-Tunisian-kosher cafe I watch men in yarmulkes, dreadlocks and Muslim crocheted caps pore over electrical goods that fell off the back of a truck while women, mostly bareheaded, walk by with their groceries. Omeyya Seddik, an activist with the Mouvement de l'Immigration et des Banlieues (part of a broad network of human rights, Muslim and feminist groups opposed to the new law) carefully explains the hijab ban in terms of the twin themes of French electoral debate: security (passionate project of the steely Sarkozy) and the notion of a French "identity crisis." He agrees that something has shifted lately among Muslims: "What's new is that there are more public, political expressions with an Islamic basis, and that some women are choosing to wear the hijab as a—vague—act of rebellion." But on the scattered attacks on synagogues (which peaked in 2002) he is a little defensive: "It's just violence; it's *Clockwork Orange*." For all his thoughtful honesty I get the sense that he, too, may be glossing over something; that militant fundamentalism in Europe tends to look either huge or insignificant, depending on where you stand.

I ask Nelcya Delanoe, a professor of American history at Nanterre and the daughter of a Moroccan independence activist, what she thinks. She tells me she's seen unofficial mosques multiplying in Paris, in living rooms and basements, attended by men with beards and women in black. Over the past two years women in strict Shiite hijab have begun to appear in her classes. As a feminist and a scholar of the Koran, she finds they make her uncomfortable; she invites them to lunch and talks to them about the choice they're making. "In Morocco," she says, "the imams were put in place by Hassan thirty years ago to destroy the left. Now he's gone, the left has been destroyed and there's no one to control the imams.... Here too, the left is gone; what we have now is Le Penism without Le Pen. I am against the ban *and* against the scarf. I just wish women didn't have to be a battlefield again."

Outside the Lycée Suger in the suburb of St. Denis, Samia, Rania and their friend—all 17—clearly don't want to be a battlefield. They say no one is for the law; they don't see why there's such a fuss about a piece of cloth. Rania has worn her scarf to school since she was 14; she accepts that when the law comes in she'll have to take it off. "This thing has fallen from the sky," she says, "because people are worried about Islam." Samia, in pinstriped trousers, corkscrew curls and kohl, butts in: "It's not a Muslim country—it's French—it's Christian." Christian? "Well, a teacher said, 'It's because of you that there's no pork in the canteen'—but there's fish every Friday."

Samia says she'll put on the hijab when she is married; she doesn't wear it now because she doesn't pray that way, and anyway you've got to enjoy your youth. She thinks some girls are forced to wear it by their parents; Rania shakes her head. Rania believes fifteen to twenty girls wear the hijab to school; Samia looks incredulous. They're comfortable disagreeing, but when a larger gaggle of bareheaded girls comes up, Rania withdraws a bit. Miriam is the only one who speaks out for the law, "because we're in a secular country, and we have to respect the country where we are. In Algeria French people can't go around in shorts and sandals. Wearing the veil marks people out as different. At school, we have to be on the same level. And besides, I want to see her lovely hair...." No one wants to argue. They joke instead, about wearing a cross on your front, a Star of David on your back and a veil on your head, about covering up bad hair, about whether I know Eminem.

When the others leave, Rania stays behind to walk me to the Metro. Away from them, she tells me that she wears the hijab not for protection against men but out of fear of God: "This life is nothing, nothing. When I go to the next life God will ask me lots of questions, and I will have to answer. When I have to take off my scarf because of the law, God will understand. But the people who made the law, he will punish them terribly." I see that for her the scarf marks and protects a feeling of difference that can't be easily named: She's quieter, more spiritual, less socially at ease; she's private; she's not North African but Indian. What politician has the right to deny her the expression she has chosen for her strengths and vulnerabilities? When she asks me what I will write in my article I tell her I'll say that the law is unjust, that the government has no right to tell people what to wear. But afterward I wish I'd also asked her why she feels her God to be so strict and punishing.

I think the French law is wrong because it makes schoolgirls the lightning rods for a sense of intolerable tension. A crisis about

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immigration, integration, poverty, political representation and the rise of a fundamentalist Islam (threatening above all to Muslims) is being played out across young women's lives. On one side is the state, with its long history of racism and its alienating language of prohibition. On the other are the imams preaching religion as bulwark and barricade against the West's injustices, hypocrisies and failures. The rhetoric of the war on terror draws the tensions tighter. Banning the hijab at school won't rescue girls from fundamentalist fathers or weaken the Islamists, who will exploit it as another instance of anti-Muslim prejudice. Instead, it weakens liberalism. Rather than teaching confidence in rational debate, the law suggests that France's Enlightenment values can't withstand the inroads of a militant religion. And to girls like Rania, who ought to be drawn in and given tools to question everything, it may teach only secrecy and alienation. ■

DISCREDITED AND BROKE, THE SCHOOL PRIVATIZER FOUND AN UNLIKELY WHITE KNIGHT.

How Edison Survived

DAVID MOBERG

In the early 1990s media entrepreneur Chris Whittle became the darling of the free-market, antigovernment right by promising that private, for-profit businesses could manage schools better than public boards of education. His Edison Schools, he claimed, would grow into a corporate giant by educating children better and more cheaply than public schools. Teachers' unions were initially skeptical, then increasingly critical as the results came in. But Whittle attracted both enthusiastic investors and support from politicians like Republican Governors George Bush, Tom Ridge and William Weld. After Edison went public in 1999, its stock price doubled in two years.

But by 2002 Edison was on the ropes. Its stock had crashed from $37 to as little as 14 cents. Whittle had long since abandoned his original, controversial goal of building a network of private, for-profit schools, but even the strategy of contracting to privately manage public and charter schools proved flawed. Plagued by local opposition and severely criticized for its educational performance, Edison was hemorrhaging money ($354 million in twelve years), and had lost one-fourth of its contracts.

Edison's collapse would have been a major embarrassment for boosters of educational privatization—that is, if an unlikely white knight hadn't come to the rescue, purchasing the company for $182 million. Edison's savior, ironically, was the Florida Retirement System (FRS)—the pension fund for public employees, roughly half of them teachers, whose union has vigorously criticized both Edison and privatization. The purchase, made by Liberty Partners, an investment firm that made private equity investments exclusively with FRS money, not only put the retirement security of public employees at risk; it financially underwrote the cause of privatization, which public employee unions oppose as a threat to jobs and the pensions of its members. But neither public employees nor their unions had a voice in the matter.

The deal was signed last July but only became public in September, when public employee unions, Florida Democratic legislators and several prominent newspapers criticized the deal, suggesting unsavory political motives. "The politics smells and, more to the point, so does the bottom line," the *Palm Beach Post* editorialized last October. Florida Governor Jeb Bush is an ardent promoter of privatization and school vouchers, and the Florida Education Association was a leader in fighting his re-election in 2002. Although there is no direct evidence of Governor Bush's personal involvement, a closely linked network of Republican politicians and contributors, pension officials, lobbyists and investment managers had an interest in pleasing the Governor and saving Edison. This web of relationships appears to have facilitated the buyout, in which Liberty Partners betrayed both the principles and the financial interests of the public employees it was supposed to serve.

When Edison manages a public school, it implements a standard curriculum (mostly drawn from widely used programs), lengthens the school day and year, tests students repeatedly, and often provides extras, such as computers. The company is theoretically paid the average per pupil funds spent in public schools. But Edison negotiates contracts in a way that usually gives the company more money per student than in comparable schools, and Edison also shifts many support costs, such as busing, back to public authorities. Critics say Edison also cuts support staff (at times increasing discipline problems), avoids handicapped students and pushes out problem students. Edison's strategy often pushes out experienced teachers; relies heavily on lower-cost, newer teachers whom Edison trains; and increases teacher turnover—raising costs and undercutting teaching.

Edison claims that its established schools produce yearly test-score gains several times better than in public schools. "We're in this to do great things in achievement," Whittle said. "Last year our gains actually improved across the entire system." But several independent studies question those claims. "With a rigorous curriculum, a longer day and a longer year, you don't need to be an education professor to know that should produce better results, but to my surprise, it didn't," said Western Michigan University education professor Gary Miron. "They were doing similarly or slightly worse." Under contract from Edison, the RAND Corpo-

David Moberg, a senior editor at In These Times, *writes frequently for* The Nation *on labor issues.*

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ration is now evaluating Edison's performance.

For an enterprise based on cutting overhead, Edison has heavy costs for marketing, highly paid bureaucrats and logistics for a system spread across the country (and four schools in England). Edison kept promising that operating on a larger scale would increase efficiencies, but education research suggests they already have passed the size limit for efficiency gains. "They're losing money while getting a higher amount of money [than public schools] for the services they provide," concludes Henry Levin, director of the National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education at Columbia University. Many districts have canceled Edison contracts, complaining of both excessive costs and inadequate improvements in student performance.

Unions fight privatization as a threat to jobs, wages and unionization, but American Federation of Teachers privatization expert Nancy Van Meter also says, "Our top leadership believes Edison is a diversion. We know what works. We should be talking about what works and not wasting time over something largely irrelevant." Teachers' unions in cities like Peoria, Illinois, argue that tax money would be better spent on reforming public schools than on hiring Edison.

A network of GOP contributors, lobbyists and investment managers had an interest in pleasing Jeb Bush and saving Edison.

Investors ignored Edison's flaws until the company got a much smaller than expected contract to run schools in Philadelphia in 2002. At the same time, the Securities and Exchange Commission forced Edison to report its income correctly, revealing even worse financial performance. Edison had to borrow at high interest rates, and public scrutiny of its problems made it a hard pitch for even a fabled salesman like Whittle.

In 2002 Whittle retained the Bear Stearns investment firm to look for a private buyer. Only four of seventy-six potential private equity investors made a bid. The winner was Liberty Partners, which paid $112 million for the stock (except for 4 percent Whittle retained) and $70 million in a new loan. But the biggest winner was Whittle: *Fortune* estimated he could gain $21 million, plus new loans, an extension on old loans, pay that nearly doubled to a minimum of $600,000 a year and a bonus that could be worth nearly triple his base pay.

Liberty Partners is an unusual firm. Many private equity companies use money from rich individuals, including the firm's principal partners, and from institutional investors, like pension funds, to buy public or private companies, spreading the risk among many different investors. But all of Liberty's money—about $1.8 billion—comes from the $92 billion Florida pension fund. So FRS became virtually the sole owner of Edison. In late November of last year, after public criticism of the deal had surfaced, Liberty's eight partners also invested 2 percent of equity, a relatively small share. By nearly any standard, the Florida pension fund's purchase was very large and undiversified, and it fell outside Liberty's standard portfolio and expertise.

While Liberty was bidding for Edison, it was also negotiating renewal of its contract with the Florida State Board of Administration, which oversees the pension fund. An outside consultant to SBA, Alignment Capital, produced a series of scathingly critical reports on Liberty Partners from April 2002 to early July 2003. It recommended, for example, that SBA should "terminate the relationship as soon as possible" if it could not renegotiate terms. Alignment found that Liberty's investments were poorly chosen, were inadequately diversified, and performed badly for the level of risk in its portfolio. Its records were in "shocking…disarray," and its fees "particularly egregious." Alignment recommended that Liberty not invest in both equity and debt of a company.

As the sole trustees of SBA, Governor Bush and two other state elected officials have ultimate responsibility for the retirement system's investment strategies and relationships with its investment managers, like Liberty. Unlike with pension funds in many other states, the beneficiaries—current workers and retirees—have no direct representation or voice. The executive director of SBA is Coleman Stipanovich, whose brother is J.M. "Mac" Stipanovich, a highly influential Republican fundraiser and lobbyist who has been a political strategist for both Jeb Bush and former Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris (of 2000 presidential election fame) and chief of staff for former Florida Republican Governor Bob Martinez, later Edison's lobbyist in the state.

Last July 14, Liberty formally signed the deal with Edison, which Coleman Stipanovich had known about since March. On July 15 the SBA director for alternative investments wrote to Liberty Partners proposing contract changes: Liberty would limit investments to no more than 20 percent of any company, or $60 million; it would not be allowed to invest in debt and equity; and its general partners would invest 5 percent in any equity. Under those conditions, Liberty could not have bought Edison the day before.

The timing was very curious, but SBA says it was just a "coincidence" that "had nothing to do with Edison." Stipanovich also continued to defend Liberty and its purchase of Edison, even last fall after the Alignment critiques became public. Both he and Governor Bush said it would have been inappropriate for them to intervene in the decision politically. But many Floridians were already upset with risky pension schemes and blamed lack of oversight for Florida's pension fund losing $325 million on Enron stock in 2002—three times the loss of any other pension fund—when its investment manager bought heavily as the stock plummeted. "Pardon the sarcasm," the *St. Petersburg Times* editorialized after the Edison deal became known last September, "but was there no Enron stock left to buy?"

With its contract up for renewal and under criticism, Liberty had an interest in pleasing Jeb Bush, who had promoted privatization and school vouchers (even though his programs have encountered legal problems, criminal investigations and a state investigation finding serious "lack of accountability"). How better to do that than save the flagship of school privatization?

There were also complex links of contracts and fundraising among many principal figures in the deal that created opportunities for attempted influence. For example, Liberty employed a Philadelphia law firm, Blank Rome, to review the Edison deal. Blank Rome had previously reviewed Edison for the pro-privatization School Reform Commission in Philadelphia. Blank Rome's chairman, David Girard-diCarlo, is a top-level fund-

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raiser for George Bush and close to former Governor Ridge, an Edison advocate. Over the past two years many Blank Rome partners have contributed heavily to both Jeb Bush and George Bush campaign funds, coincidentally on the same days Jeb Bush hosted major fundraising events and as two of the principal partners at Liberty, Peter Bennett and Michael Stakias, made maximum contributions to both Bushes. James Cayne, chairman of Bear Stearns, which found Liberty as Edison's buyer, is also a "Pioneer," the second-highest level of George Bush fundraisers. The links extend beyond fundraising: Last October, after the Edison deal was concluded, Edison was the lead sponsor of a national school choice gala that gave Jeb Bush its "Head of the Class" award. These ties do not in themselves reveal improper influence-peddling, but they suggest a common political interest of all the principal figures and many opportunities for informal conversations.

Liberty, Stipanovich and Whittle maintain that the Edison purchase is a great deal. Edison did report its first quarterly profit last June, and Whittle—who says he has always been optimistic—predicts linear increases in profits and 15–20 percent annual growth in the near future. He claims Edison recently got rid of unprofitable contracts, improved efficiency and expanded profitable tutoring and summer school businesses, which now account for about a third of the 130,000 students Edison "serves." But Edison faces tough competition in the ancillary businesses, and education analyst Jeffrey Silber of investment banker Harris Nesbitt Gerard says Edison's "core business is still unprofitable." Asked what she thought of Liberty's purchase of Edison, Jefferies brokerage education analyst Kirsten Letsinger said, "I probably would have done something else."

"There's nothing you can point to to believe this company will turn around and be profitable, and the assets of public employees are at serious risk," argued Steve Abrecht, director of capital stewardship for the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). "One of the big problems we have is that the people with the most at stake, whose retirement security is vested in this fund, have absolutely no voice in governing the fund."

"With all the possible investments that you could make in our economy where the likelihood of making a significant profit is so much more evident, why would you pick this company?" Abrecht asked. "How do you explain it except that if Edison had collapsed it would have been a huge blow to people who promote privatization of education, not as a business, but out of ideological motivations?"

The SEIU and other unions are campaigning to persuade public pension funds not to invest in companies that privatize public work. "We think it's not in the interest of our members, who are public employees, for their own retirement assets to be used to start up companies that put their jobs at risk," Abrecht said. Union pressure last year discouraged pension-fund investment in a longtime private equity backer of Edison, Leeds Weld, which then announced that it would no longer make risky investments in private school management businesses. Soon CalPERS, the California pension giant, will adopt a policy—similar to those governing public pension funds in New York City, Los Angeles and Ohio—to avoid investments in privatization that threaten the jobs and pensions of public employees. Edison might now be a footnote to history, demonstrating the failure of risky privatization schemes in education, if only the Florida pension fund had done the same. ■

EXCHANGE
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

New York City

■ Alexander Cockburn omitted the greatest difference: Hitler was elected! EZRA SHERMAN

COCKBURN REPLIES

Petrolia, Calif.

■ After Editor vanden Heuvel asked me to reconsider the comparison of AH with all US Presidents, I did review the record and excused Warren Harding, on the grounds that he was too busy stealing, there weren't too many Native Americans left to wipe out and, anyway, in the 1920s war wasn't popular. But Harding aside, I stand by what I wrote, including my reservations about Bush/Hitler comparisons. It's like comparing Pee Wee Herman to the Marquis de Sade.

Paul Goode and Peter Dreier fire wildly at imaginary targets or the wrong guy. I've publicly dissented many times from the idea that America stands on the brink of fascism. It was Dave Lindorff, not I, who wrote that line (I imagine it was tongue in cheek) about Bush not having gassed people "yet." On Keynes and Hitler I was scarcely making a novel point. A quarter of a century ago J.K. Galbraith wrote in *The Age of Uncertainty* that Hitler "was the true protagonist of the Keynesian ideas." In the forward to the German edition of his book *The General Theory* (1936), Keynes wrote that "the theory of output as a whole, which is what the following book purports to provide, is much more easily adapted to the conditions of a totalitarian state, than...under conditions of free competition and a large measure of laissez-faire."

To the extent to which the German economy recovered in the 1930s, it was one of the first to be freed, rather accidentally, from the horrible antics of the bankers who spent most of the 1920s trying to kick industrial society to death. Hitler put Germans to work building the autobahns, even though Germany didn't have much of an auto industry to put cars on those roads. Hence Hitler's interest in the Volkswagen. When they ran out of roads to build, they put the concrete pourers to work building the Siegfried Line. The housing boom sprang in part from Hitler's hopes for increased production of Aryans.

The Nazis didn't dare cut living standards to the degree needed in planning for a long war. But even if they had, they didn't have the industrial system to fill the orders. Serious German rearmament really took off only after the invasion of the Soviet Union, and then with the Allied bombing, at which point it soared. The German forces occupying the Rhineland in 1936 were somewhat of a paper tiger, as General Jodl later testified at Nuremberg when he said "the French covering army could have blown us to pieces."

Through the 1930s the appeasers, also the decent antiwar crowd, all grotesquely magnified Hitler's supposed WMDs, primarily the Luftwaffe. Then as now, there were weapons of mass deception. The Luftwaffe flew the same planes round and round at an air show in Berlin to fool foreign military attachés. Figures on German aircraft production were inflated and faithfully quoted by Churchill in the House of Commons. The Wehrmacht's World War II logistics relied hugely on horses, which were pretty much confined to the ceremonial in US and British armies.

But I'll bet that what really bothers Dreier is any challenge to Democratic Party orthodoxy on the topic of St. Paul Wellstone or Ralph Nader. In 2004 that's the Thought Crime Beyond All Thought Crimes, which Jeffrey St. Clair and I perpetrate in our forthcoming book *Dime's Worth of Difference: Beyond the Lesser of Two Evils*. C'mon, Dreier! Be a man! Invite us down to Occidental and we'll debate you and your sometime writing partner, Saul Landau.

ALEXANDER COCKBURN

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

The Wages of Fear

The 'other America' includes millions of Americans who work.

KATHERINE NEWMAN

THE WORKING POOR: Invisible in America. By David K. Shipler. Knopf. 319 pp. $25.

Lyndon Johnson launched the War on Poverty in his State of the Union Message exactly forty years ago. Inclined to remember him mainly for the carnage and defeat of Vietnam, we forget how noble his vision was on the domestic front. "The richest nation on earth," he proclaimed, "can afford to win [this war on poverty]. We cannot afford to lose it." Johnson's words sound like a clarion call from a distant planet in our more meanspirited era of "limited government," the "third way" and relentless skepticism over the capacity of any public policy to reverse persistent poverty.

We have seen dramatic efforts to address the problem of poverty, just not the kind that Johnson, Bobby Kennedy or Michael Harrington had in mind. Individualist theories of poverty—which attribute it to personal, behavioral "disorder"—met institutional theory—which indicted government for ostensibly coddling the poor—leaving us with the "compassionate conservatism" of today's White House. For Republicans and an alarming number of Democrats, "help" for the poor has meant shredding the threadbare safety net underneath them. Those who sink, along with their children, become the unfortunate cost of correcting a flawed system of social supports. Those who swim prove the wisdom of the conservative approach. QED.

These simplistic views were easy to uphold when the subject at hand was the dependent poor, that small but symbolically demonized group of long-term welfare recipients. It is harder—or so one might think—to maintain illusions about the self-induced nature of poverty when the conversation shifts to the working poor. That was my hunch when I embarked on research on low-wage workers in Harlem, three years before the onset of the 1996 legislation that ended "welfare as we know it." My conviction at the time was that the focus on welfare recipients had set the country on a punitive course that might be reversed if we spent more time thinking about the far larger category of the working poor—those full-time workers who still cannot pull above the magic poverty line.

Poverty, David Shipler suggests, is an abyss with so many causes that its victims cannot win by solving one problem at a time.

Surely, I thought, conservatives could not pull those old "undeserving poor" strings on minimum-wage workers who take stigmatized jobs, enduring unpredictable shifts and waging a relentless struggle to pay the rent on dilapidated housing. Surely these poor people warrant the label "deserving." Not so fast. From the pages of *The New Republic* and the pen of Manhattan Institute "experts" came the argument that these workers were still poor because they, too, had blown their education or had kids out of wedlock.

We are still a long way off from making the working poor visible and legitimate claimants of public support. Perhaps it takes a gifted journalist to shine a light on the problem. That is precisely what we have in *The Working Poor*, David Shipler's insightful and moving chronicle of working poverty after welfare reform. Shipler's subject has been the topic of considerable discussion elsewhere. But because he writes with enormous grace, he captures the immense frustration endured by the working poor as few others have. A former reporter for the *New York Times* whose previous books were on the Arab-Israeli conflict and American

Katherine Newman is the dean of social science at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study and Malcolm Wiener Professor of Urban Studies at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. She is the author of No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City *(1999) and* A Different Shade of Gray: Mid-Life and Beyond in the Inner City *(2003). Her latest book,* Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings, *was published by Basic in February.*

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race relations, Shipler takes the reader on a journey into the daily lives of line workers in Midwestern meatpacking plants, Los Angeles sweatshops and factories that manufacture everything from plastic pots to rubber hoses. The everyday struggles involved in paying the rent, putting food on the table, keeping kids safe in dangerous neighborhoods, warding off illness, worrying about teenagers going off the deep end and fighting with unfaithful partners come alive in his hands and defy simplistic conclusions about the motives and commitments of America's poor. Shipler carefully wraps the dimensions of working poverty (inadequate wages, oppressive working conditions) in the lives of real people who are at times the authors of their own troubles and at others victims of forces beyond their control.

The value of *The Working Poor* goes beyond powerful writing, however. It is rich in causal arguments. Two in particular struck me as essential: the cascading quality of poverty, and the psychology of hopelessness. Poverty is portrayed as an abyss with so many contributing causes that its victims cannot win by solving one problem at a time. Each debilitating hassle gives rise to yet another. "On the surface," he notes, "it seems odd that an interest rate can be determined by the condition of an apartment, which in turn can generate illness and medical bills, which may then translate into a poor credit rating, which limits the quality of an automobile that can be purchased, which jeopardizes a worker's reliability in getting to work, which limits promotions and restricts the wage, which confines a family to the dilapidated apartment. Such are the interlocking deficits of poverty, one reinforcing the other until an entire structure of want has been built."

Each piece of this impossible puzzle is, no doubt, a variable in somebody's regression equation, but it is Shipler who points to the unstoppable chain reaction. The poverty cascade he identifies helps us to understand the persistence of want in a country with so much wealth. Poor workers struggle against formidable odds to address one or two problems, only to be undone by the other forty that pull them down into poverty traps.

We have heard a lot in the past fifty years about the internal, subjective wounds that make it so hard for poor people to rally their spirits in the face of the "interlocking deficits" Shipler describes. Oscar Lewis gave this a name several generations ago: the culture of poverty. Many writers have since rejected the notion, proposing explanations that deflect blame from the victim and place it squarely on systemic structural barriers in the labor market: racial discrimination, technological change that has favored skilled labor and a spatial mismatch between suburban job growth and the confinement of the poor to inner-city neighborhoods.

Shipler returns us to the psychological toll poverty exacts, without lapsing into the more objectionable aspects of Lewis's model. Instead, he draws a portrait of the forces that lead to punishing forms of depression. Poor, young mothers who have come of age without the nurturing they needed are often unaware of the needs their own babies have for bonding, consistent affection, and loving interaction. As a result, their children often display cognitive deficits—which surface as poor performance in school—before they reach the age of eight. Shipler devotes a chapter to the sexual abuse of children in poor households, particularly young girls victimized by their own mothers' boyfriends, or kids in foster homes that make the English poorhouse look positively appealing.

Teenage girls who emerge from these nightmarish conditions turn into women who are lonely, scared and hopeless, desperate for partners who are strong and protective. They look for love in all the wrong places, mistake control freaks for affectionate companions and find themselves at the mercy of battering boyfriends. This is not Oscar Lewis's culture of poverty, in which people fail to lift themselves out of poverty because of their inability to defer gratification or plan for the future. The world of Shipler's working poor is shaped by physical force, poor health, deep depression, now compounded by government regulations that insist on "personal responsibility" from people who can barely support themselves and often suffer from acute despair.

These are not just women's problems. Shipler also investigates the impact of violence on boys in the street and men in prison. In a particularly insightful chapter titled "The Daunting Workplace," he introduces the reader to Kevin Fields, a 280-pound ex-con with a shaved head and a gold earring. Fields spent several years in the pen for assault, a biographical detail he dutifully discloses to employers. When asked how he would handle conflict on the job, he replies with candor: "I always tell them I'm gonna stand up for myself because I'm a man.... You know, I ain't gonna let nobody run over me." In his classic *Code of the Street*, the sociologist Elijah Anderson covered this territory, pointing out the imperative to talk tough and threaten violence to fend off would-be attackers. Hair-trigger tempers develop among men (and women) who see backing down from any kind of

The Old Couple

Please tell me how the shoehorn manages to keep
Its shape the same for centuries. At dusk my ignorance
Slips away and hides its eggs in the woods.

We all know when a great man or woman
Is about to die; and we fight that. Many of the Jews
Wanted to speak privately to Pilate.

Our parents' faces at dawn have so much grief
That they resemble those stone faces on Easter
Island, gazing toward some missing Friday.

Iron and earth are an old couple who have lived
Together for eons. As with all bad couples,
It takes immense energy to separate them.

After every one of our wars, the newly dead
Hold out a cup to us. What can we do
But testify to a thousand years of darkness?

As a boy I saw the hitch slide off the drawbar.
I sensed how difficult my life would be the night
I heard the sound of iron hitting the ground.

Robert Bly

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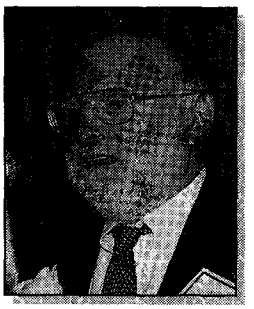

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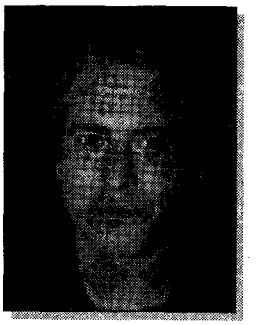
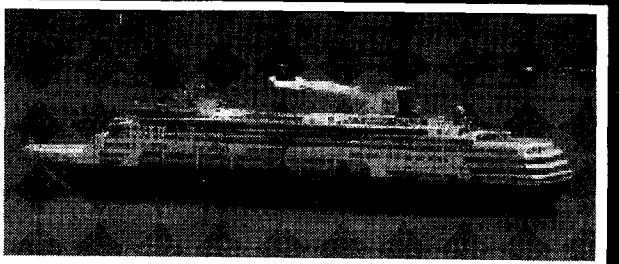


Christopher Scheer
Co-author of *The Five Biggest Lies Bush Told Us About Iraq*

The Herald/Gordon Terris. © SMG Newspapers Ltd

Naomi Klein
Nation "Lookout" Columnist

Date	Day	Ports of Call	Arrive	Depart
Dec. 5	Sun	Ft. Lauderdale, Florida		5:00PM
Dec. 6	Mon	Day at Sea		
Dec. 7	Tue	Day at Sea		
Dec. 8	Wed	Phillipsburg, St. Maarten	8:00AM	6:00PM
Dec. 9	Thu	Road Town, Tortola	7:00AM	4:00PM
Dec. 10	Fri	Day at Sea		
Dec. 11	Sat	Half Moon Cay, Bahamas	8:00AM	4:00PM
Dec. 12	Sun	Ft. Lauderdale, Florida	8:00AM	



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confrontation as a sign of weakness. So they don't. Instead, in the workplace, in the schoolyard and in personal relations, ex-cons lose their tempers—quickly. Employers do not have to put up with confrontational characters; they just fire them (or simply don't hire them in the first place). It doesn't help when these temperamental problems pile on top of real skill deficits: the inability to read directions or make change or address an envelope. Bad employment records make it nearly impossible to climb out of working poverty.

I would be derelict in my social scientific duty, though, if I did not point out that journalists like Shipler generally avoid assessing how much these kinds of problems contribute to working poverty. This may sound pedantic, but what fraction of the poverty problem can be explained by poor parenting? Ten percent? Fifty percent? How powerful is sexual abuse as an explanation for interrupted schooling or failure in the labor market? How do these sources of disability compare, for example, with the press of a glutted labor market that pushes wages down? How much do they matter if labor markets tighten, wages rise and employers have to search among these very people for a labor force? The book leaves the reader with the impression that most working poor Americans are plagued by the family problems and psychological liabilities Shipler describes, but we don't really know that for a fact, and there is an abundance of sociological literature that would quarrel with him. In the end, we need more than poignant description. We need some understanding of which forces matter the most in pushing people to the poverty wall.

The only people Shipler sees out there who have been able to surmount working poverty are the immigrants who band together as extended families and the lucky graduates of successful training programs that give people skills that match employer needs. Solidarity and kinship ties make a difference, and they are alive and well among the Mexican migrants in the fields of North Carolina and the sweatshops of Los Angeles, where extended families band together, pressing all available hands—including children—into the labor market toward the support of multigeneration households. Thoughtful training makes a difference too, for employers (like Xerox, which Shipler praises for hiring graduates of select welfare-to-work programs) will hire these survivors, giving them decent jobs with benefits. Yet, as Shipler points out, these workers are still at the mercy of their employers. Enlightened bosses care about the promotion and security of their hard-working employees. But the examples of forward-thinking employers are few and far between in this book, relative to the many instances of exploitative Wal-Marts and the near-slavery conditions of many sweatshops and migrant labor camps. Undocumented immigrants are in the most vulnerable position, but native-born women coming off welfare or down-and-out men coming out of jail are only a few small notches above.

What, then, does Shipler propose we do? His final chapter is an intelligent summary of programs and policies that have been discussed at length by others. But he makes two important points that are not the usual stuff of policy discussion. First, he notes that we do know how to fix certain problems and yet we fail to put enough resources into successful programs to make a real dent. Only a fraction of the children who would benefit from early childhood education ever see it. Thousands of people are waiting for drug treatment, English-as-a-second-language classes and meaningful job training. "When we do it right, it works," Shipler writes. He cites Representative George Miller of California speaking in the 1980s: "And everywhere we've tried to do it on the cheap...we end up spending money with no appreciable results." We may need a raft of new ideas for fighting poverty, but Shipler points out that the whole country would be better off if we just expanded the reach of the old ones that worked.

The second telling point is that the poor have been ideological punching bags for too long. Politicians are more interested in scoring points with voters distant from the realities of working poverty than they are in actually solving the problem. How do we avoid more of the same? This is where Shipler is at his most idealistic. People who vote do much better in the policy sweepstakes than people who don't. Older Americans vote in large numbers: That is why politicians who cut a childcare tax credit for the working poor fall all over themselves to provide a prescription drug benefit for the elderly. A massive and perpetual voter registration campaign—the kind we knew so well from the early days of the civil rights movement—is the only hope for the working poor, who simply do not make it to the ballot box. It's an old-fashioned remedy that will strike many on the left as naïve, but I think he's got a point. ■

The End of the Affair

ACHY OBEJAS

DANCING WITH CUBA: A Memoir of the Revolution.
By Alma Guillermoprieto. Pantheon. 290 pp. $25.

It's been a while since Cuba, that caiman-shaped Caribbean isle, ceased to be a place on the map. At some point, it came unhinged and floated away, transformed into a gilded reflecting pool, a repository of dreams. Those with hope or memory (true or false) called out: Here lies utopia, whether the socialist fantasy or the golden recollections of its exiles. Cuba is, or was, or could be, an exemplary nation, a veritable beacon, egalitarian and progressive.

For a small country—about 68,000 square miles and a population of just over 11 million, the navel of the Americas—this is an awesome, crushing burden. Because if Cuba inspires, it also provokes despair.

Alma Guillermoprieto's bittersweet memoir *Dancing with Cuba* is about falling in love with this mythic place or, more precisely, trying to. It is also about the tense relationship between realism and idealism, a sympathetic yet ultimately unsparing account of a personal odyssey that ends not triumphantly but nonetheless extraordinarily.

Guillermoprieto is no stranger to Cuba or Latin America. A longtime contributor to *The New Yorker* and *The New York Review of Books*, she has covered the carnage between the drug cartels and Colombia's successively impotent governments, civil wars all over Central America, the assault on Grenada by US troops, urban life and poverty in Brazil, political corruption in her native Mexico and revolutionary victory in Nicaragua.

Her report from Cuba during the Pope's 1998 historic visit unfolded as a wrenching portrait of an ever more isolated Comandante, his military fatigues put away for the week in exchange for a designer suit, trying desperately to keep his dignity as he compromised and compromised in order to sur-

Achy Obejas's most recent book is a novel, Days of Awe *(Ballantine).*

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vive—and, ultimately, to hold on to power. Through her two essay collections in the last decade, *Looking for History* and *The Heart That Bleeds*, she has argued that Latin America's politics—and indeed its political destiny—are eternally cloaked in illusion, its own identity unequivocally tied to its complex, paradoxical relationship to the United States. (Cuba's version of this, of course, is total resistance to the United States in spite of enduring cultural and emotional ties.) While Guillermoprieto has never attempted to disguise her affinity for the leftist ambitions of Latin America's revolutionaries, it is also true that she has never gone out of her way to massage or rationalize their prejudices and failures (and not even those that can be traced back to US actions or policies).

Dancing with Cuba is exquisitely detailed about the physicality of the place, the sensations, the conversations. Yet in the prologue Guillermoprieto is up front about the story's sources: "I've retained only fragmented memories and a few concrete souvenirs that help me prove to myself, when I have my doubts, that I really did go on that journey that so thoroughly unravelled my life." The book depends instead on documents, news reports and Guillermoprieto's re-created moments and conversations. Many of the characters are composites, though a number of historic figures flit in and out—most notably the late Manuel Piñeiro, the Cuban spymaster, whom she portrays with a measured sympathy. Still, the book never feels impressionistic; it's grounded in solid reporting, though the tone throughout is wistful.

Dancing with Cuba covers six months in 1970, including what is for many the pivotal moment of the Cuban Revolution: not the Bay of Pigs, not the missile crisis, but the Harvest of 10 Million Tons, a wildly ambitious campaign to produce about 3 million more tons of sugar than the country ever had, even during the exploitative "Dance of the Millions" in the 1920s or the golden age of greed under Batista. The campaign's goal was to wipe out Cuba's considerable debt to the Soviet Union in one fell swoop. (At the time, the island had taken out a loan from the USSR larger than its entire existing liability, essentially turning the island into the Soviet Union's indentured servant.)

But what was at stake was much more than just long-term economic independence. It was the very heart of all the revolution could be. After all, Cuban Communism, for all its orthodoxy and very untropical puritanism, was considerably different from the Soviet variant: much more personal, perhaps much more—let's just say it—Western. The Cubans wanted to loosen reliance on the Soviets because they wanted to do things their own way.

Guillermoprieto went to Cuba as a 20-year-old to teach modern dance (in a classroom with no mirrors, to avoid counterrevolutionary vanity) but wound up as witness to the historic mass mobilization of the country for the 10 million tons. Months after the campaign's failure, the island was still feeling the depth of its wound; indeed, at the end of Guillermoprieto's stay, the harvest of the 10 million was still too painful to talk about except in the most oblique ways.

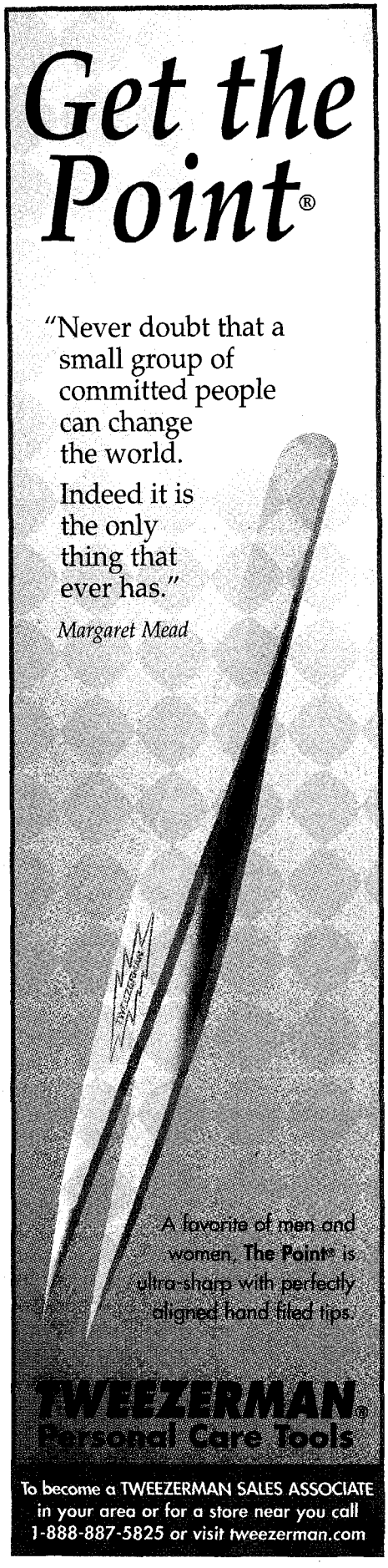
That was a huge contrast to her arrival, when glassy-eyed, committed Cubans of all stripes talked feverishly about going to cut sugarcane in the countryside, or working double and triple shifts to relieve others so they could go cut cane. For Guillermoprieto, this kind of dedication was unheard of, exotic and alluring.

The island's media were filled with all sorts of happy-hued stories about the nation's superhuman effort and the certain success of the enterprise. *Granma*, the Cuban Communist Party newspaper, pictured a daily graph that measured the yield. The billboards exhorted: *Diez Millones!* ("Ten million!), *A Cumplir!* (Let's do our part!") and *Comandante en Jefe, Ordene!* ("Commander in chief, we're at your command!").

But then Murphy's Law went into effect: Nature was unkind; it soon became evident that urban volunteers, no matter how devoted, did more harm than good with their machetes; the sugar mills, many fallow since the revolution, didn't grind well; machinery arrived late, or not at all, or missing vital parts. The planning had been, to put it mildly, overoptimistic. Money that could have been used toward the revolution's more essential needs—food, transportation, medicine, education—had instead been diverted to cover the vast, unexpected costs of the disaster. In the end, Cuba was burdened with a much greater, more binding debt to the Soviets than it had ever had before.

Guillermoprieto touched down in Havana on May 1, 1970, just twenty days before Castro first acknowledged the dimensions of the catastrophe in a masterful, hourslong speech before hundreds of thousands at the Plaza de la Revolución. It was then that he first uttered what is perhaps the revolution's most chilling slogan: *Convertir el revés en victoria!* ("We must turn defeat into victory!"), a cry for mass rationalization.

The young Guillermoprieto, woefully ignorant not just of Cuba but of geopoli-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tics, was thus thrust into a situation to which she could only respond emotionally. She immediately found herself as enchanted as the cultish masses by Castro's vigor, his audacity, his rage, his unapologetic apology, his shameless display of shame. "There had never existed a more lucid, heroic man," writes Guillermoprieto. "His physical beauty itself was the confirmation of his extraordinary spiritual energy."

She understood too that her rapture was more the result of cadence, heat, the masses, but it didn't matter, not then: She'd heard the siren call to revolution, trying from then on to find a way to fit the artist she was into the mold of revolutionary life and expectation. What Castro had tapped in her that day—and in so many others in his more than half a century of public life—was the desire for a meaningful life. Like many people of her generation, Guillermoprieto wanted to rebel against the status quo in those tumultuous times but was desperate for order, naïve but anxious for purpose. In the Cuban revolution, she found a paradoxical key to her dilemma: "To become a rebel was to train yourself in the discipline of absolute obedience," particularly to Castro and, to a lesser extent, Che Guevara.

And even though she was in Cuba at the request of the revolution, doing work that it had specifically requested, she soon began to question the utility of that work, and by extension, of art. What good was any of it if it didn't feed anyone, if it didn't clothe anyone? By the memoir's end, however, her questions had become as blunt as they were shattering.

Looking back over a debate from those days that appeared in the magazine published by Casa de las Américas, probably Cuba's most important cultural institution, Guillermoprieto interprets the messages between the lines and poses the questions the Cuban intellectuals dared not articulate: "Why do I have such a strong desire to say what I think?... Why can the proletarians say what they think, while I have the revolutionary obligation to shut up?... Why is the fieldworker's purpose accomplished when he cuts cane, and the mechanic's purpose accomplished when he repairs the motor, while I, after having written, or painted, or criticized, have to go out and cut cane in order to fulfill my commitment to the Revolution?"

Her half-year in Cuba in 1970 is startling more than anything for the way it serves as a template of Cuban life after the revolution. Yes, there were deprivations, most directly linked to the US economic embargo, just like now. There were outrageous bureaucratic bunglings, clumsy and scandalous abuses of power (at one point, the art school director places a gun on a table to start a self-criticism meeting), condescending acts of puritanism (guards at the hotel where she stays patrol the halls to keep away her suitors, regardless of the fact that everyone is over 21, not unlike hotel security today). Back then, everyday life in Havana crept along at a snail's pace, with all entertainment venues but the Cuban art of conversation exhausted in a matter of days—exactly like now.

"To me, what seems most bizarre about the Cuba that Fidel will leave behind," writes Guillermoprieto in her final pages, "is its current status as a curio. The revolution that was supposed to modernize the world is now treasured as a timeless relic by tourists from a world all too horrifyingly modern."

Time stopped in Cuba, it's true, but it's hard to know exactly when. And that creates a constant gush of nostalgia that is no longer the sole province of Cuban exiles. The left has its own dream of what Cuba was or should be, as enduring as the memory of falling in love for the first time. No matter how poorly it ages, you just don't forget your first revolution. ■

The Pleasures of Crime

HILLARY FREY

Despite their indifference to genre fiction, American publishers of literary novels have consistently made exceptions for homegrown crime writers. Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett and James Cain have long been celebrated in collections from the prestigious Library of America as well as reissues from Vintage, arguably the most stylish paperback house in New York; Patricia Highsmith, that once-forgotten mistress of the *noir*, is finally getting her due, with a steady stream of handsome reissues from Norton and a full-length treatment of her life out now in hardcover. Meanwhile James Ellroy, our living master of the hard-boiled detective story, continues to crank out his novels for Knopf to critical acclaim. So in this globalized culture, it makes perfect sense that publishers big and small would look to crime writers from farther-flung places to diversify their lists. Detective fictions tend to follow a pleasantly familiar form, no matter their country of provenance; suspense, intrigue and murder are universally addictive plot devices.

IN THIS REVIEW:

THE SHAPE OF WATER.
By Andrea Camilleri.
Penguin. 224 pp. $5.99.

THE TERRA-COTTA DOG.
By Andrea Camilleri.
Penguin. 340 pp. $21.95.

THE SNACK THIEF.
By Andrea Camilleri.
Penguin. 298 pp. $6.99.

VOICE OF THE VIOLIN.
By Andrea Camilleri.
Viking. 249 pp. $21.95.

THE PRONE GUNMAN.
By Jean-Patrick Manchette.
City Lights. 155 pp. $11.95.

3 TO KILL.
By Jean-Patrick Manchette.
City Lights. 134 pp. $11.95.

HAVANA WORLD SERIES.
By José Latour.
Grove. 320 pp. $23.

The right sleuth, killer or thief can also be the perfect guide through an unfamiliar land. As he—and it's always a he—dodges bullets, searches for clues, hides from the cops (or his wife) and puts the pieces of the crime—as inspector or mastermind—together, we're treated to foreign delights: narrow, curvy roads that hug the Mediterranean; bustling city streets bearing the names of great leaders instead of numbers; dusty paths that snake between rundown bungalows. Of course, from beneath the seductive exotica, dark underbellies of distant locales show through. Corrupt local officials and sleazy night spots are ubiquitous; backstabbing, lying and cheating, among both friends and lovers, de rigueur.

A new quartet of detective novels from Italian crime writer Andrea Camilleri, published here by Viking and Penguin, takes us to the fictional waterfront town of Vigàta, in Sicily. Camilleri's protagonist is the overworked, straight-talking, politically radical Inspector Salvo Montalbano, whose passion for solving crimes is equaled only by his love of the perfect pasta *al dente* and the novels of his namesake, the contemporary Spanish detective writer Manuel Vazquez Montalbán. (Although Montalbán's works have not found a home in the United States, British publisher Serpent's Tail has been translating him into English for years.) When Montalbano hits a wall in his sleuthing, he's known to turn himself around by asking himself what Pepe Carvalho, Montalbán's famous sleuth, would do.

Like Mike Hammer or Sam Spade, Montalbano is the kind of guy who can't

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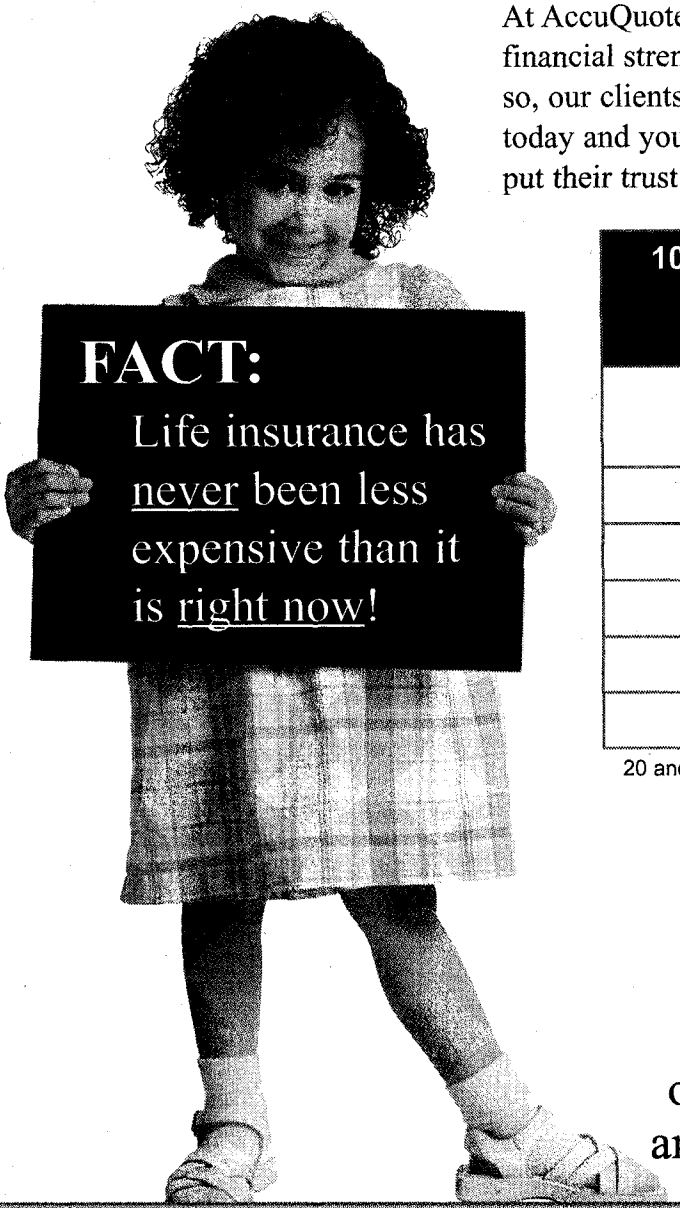

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stay out of trouble. He's in a long-term, long-distance relationship with the smart and independent Livia, but every time they arrange to see each other, a corpse or two—usually bearing the marks of a deviant tryst—comes between them. (Over the course of the four books, this puts a considerable strain on Salvo and Livia's relationship.) Montalbano is competitive and narcissistic; he exploits personal relationships to turn up clues, and often gets friends and witnesses killed during his investigations. Still, deftly and lovingly translated into English by Stephen Sartarelli, Camilleri makes it abundantly clear that under the gruff, sardonic exterior our inspector has a heart of gold, and that any outbursts, fumbles or threats are made only in the name of pursuing truth (and, often, thwarting Italy's egocentric and dishonest politicians in the process—but that's another story).

Camilleri surrounds Montalbano with a motley cast of recurring characters, among them: Free Channel newscaster Nicolò Zito, whose leftist politics are *simpatico* with the inspector's; lughead Catarella, who mangles every crucial communication meant for Montalbano; and informer Gegè, who manages The Pasture, a sort of open-air bordello where tricks are turned and drugs are dealt under cover of night. So while it makes sense to move through the books from first to last, it's far from necessary. If you're in the mood for an archeological romp, start with *The Terra-Cotta Dog*. Something with a complicated, contemporary clash-of-cultures angle, complete with a Tunisian terrorist? *The Snack Thief*. For sheer, slim elegance, the thriller *Voice of the Violin* wins; and for a dark, sexy tale of political corruption—*The Shape of Water*.

In his essay "The Guilty Vicarage," W.H. Auden described the reading of detective novels as "an addiction, like tobacco or alcohol." "If I have any work to do," he wrote, "I must be careful not to get hold of [one] for, once I begin one, I cannot work or sleep till I have finished it." Although he preferred his detective stories to take place in the English countryside, I can't help but think that Camilleri's novels would have caused Auden to procrastinate for at least a day or two.

I can't say the same for *3 to Kill* and *The Prone Gunman*, two *noir* novels by the late French writer Jean-Patrick Manchette originally published in 1976 and 1981, respectively, and translated into English by City Lights. Manchette's protagonists aren't crime solvers, and his stories aren't

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page-turners in the conventional sense. Rather, his heroes are angst-ridden antiheroes, his stories those of alienated men who unexpectedly find themselves with blood of their own, and others, on their hands. Manchette doesn't create suspense from mystery; we read to see whether our hero lives or dies.

Both *The Prone Gunman* and *3 to Kill* are full of nasty, sadistic violence, leavened just enough by irony and black humor to be tolerable. *The Prone Gunman*'s Martin Terrier is a career assassin, but one who took up his work only in order to make enough cash to marry Anne, his wealthy high school sweetheart; in *3 to Kill*, Georges Gerfaut's efforts to hide from two men who are trying to kill him provide a convenient excuse to drop out of the bourgeois life and suburban comfort that had begun to depress him in middle age.

To call Manchette's style plain would be an understatement: It's French. Like Camus (himself an admirer of *noir* fiction, especially James Cain), he writes a cool and lean prose; each sentence exists only to advance from disaster to disaster, or to relay some painful moment from the past. Here's Manchette, writing in *The Prone Gunman*:

> One Saturday evening when Anne had asked [Martin] to take her home after a party where they had danced to Miles Davis, she and he kissed violently.... She said that she found Martin much more colorful than the others, and she said that it was precisely because of his social background and because the others were spoiled children, but not him—he was acquainted with real-life problems, he worked in the summer instead of going on vacation, he had to struggle to elevate himself, and all that, she said finally, made him deeper and more mature.
>
> But when Martin slipped his tongue in her mouth, she seemed surprised.

Still, despite Martin's and Georges's aggressive, despicable behavior, willingness to murder and disdain for those who care about them, it's hard not to root for them. Their bloody triumphs provide a perverse kind of pleasure. The way Martin, once a wimpy, broken kid, outwits his pursuers makes him genuinely sexy, in that no-talk-all-action kind of way. When Georges quits whining about his life and takes control by killing a couple of thugs, it's both surprising and winning.

Ultimately, both Martin and Georges are just two men trying to figure out how, and what it means, to be happy. For Manchette, contentedness is found in a sort of

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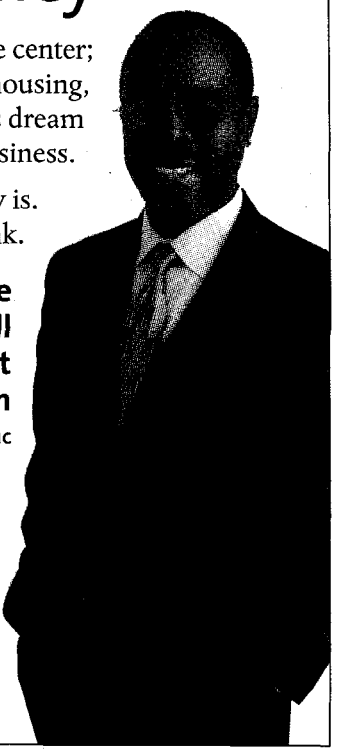

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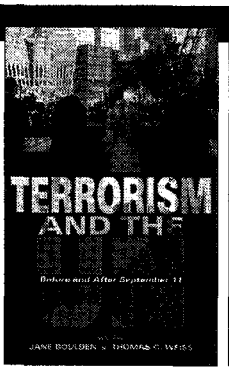

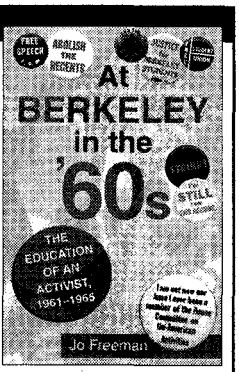

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asceticism; his characters feel most at peace once companions and things—especially money—have been cast aside. And they are, inevitably, when you have to live life on the run.

For the characters in Cuban writer José Latour's new *noir Havana World Series*, recently published by Grove, the situation is just the opposite. Latour's group of thieves, all ex-cons hoping to pull off their last and best job, wants only to get filthy rich.

The story is set in 1958 Havana, just before the revolution. While the World Series between the Braves and Yankees plays in the background, a pair of New York mob bosses hurry a plan to break up Meyer Lansky's stranglehold on Cuba's gambling scene before there's a shift in the government power structure and inside connections need to be rejiggered. On their behalf, a group of expert criminals, with the aid of an inside man, will rob Lansky's most profitable casino. The heist will yield considerable profit for the guys in New York and, more important, shame Lansky and weaken his hold on Havana nightlife.

Although *Havana World Series* gets off to a rocky start—Latour opens the book with intense focus on a character who has little to do with the plot, and the World Series winds up being a flimsy backdrop to the very dramatic robbery—it picks up considerably once we meet Mariano "Ox" Contreras, who acts as both ringleader and father figure to the other criminals. He is a reserved and intelligent man who relishes more than anything pulling off the perfect job. His plan is intricate and, at times, comical; his affection for his men, especially the young Abo, who acts as his son in part of the robbery scheme, understated and sweet.

While the first half of *Havana World Series* is a romp through the casinos and planning and, eventually, the heist, the second half follows Contreras and his crew as they separate to hide out, to spend their stolen money, to get caught, to save one another. There's torture and tension and dread; Latour's characterization of the corrupt thugs in Cuba's pre-revolutionary police force ends up being even better than his chronicle of the heist.

Of course, love stories and minor romances are wound through the story, but Latour's characters care for Cuba more than they could for any woman. The island is warm, sheltering and sexy—full of good hideouts for a group of criminals, but also for anyone looking to escape from this interminably cold winter. ■

FILMS

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STUART KLAWANS

THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

From the moment when Mel Gibson began promoting *The Passion of the Christ*—was it only ten years ago?—he has insisted that his goal was to be true to the Gospel text. Words are crucial to his project, so crucial that the film's dialogue is spoken principally in Aramaic and Latin; and words have consistently tripped him up.

Remember that for his initial, highly publicized attack against his critics, Gibson seized on the actions of an ecumenical group, which had obtained a bootleg copy of his script and expressed strong misgivings. It's unfair to judge a film by its screenplay, Gibson said, and he was right—assuming, of course, that in shooting *The Passion*, he had behaved as filmmakers ordinarily do and departed from the written word. If, on the other hand, he really had translated the Gospels to film, then the gap had presumably been closed between source and screenplay, screenplay and image. In that case, the ecumenists could easily have judged the picture by its shooting script, or (even more efficiently) by the Bible.

Gibson fell over his words for the second time when he circulated an endorsement from the Pope, reportedly obtained at a preview screening. "It is as it was," said the Pontiff, confirming the film's fidelity to Scripture; but then authorities in the Vatican disowned the remark, leaving the filmmaker with an embarrassing lacuna in his text. Is the incident as Gibson said it was? Or had John Paul never uttered the papal blurb?

Now, as the film is about to open, Gibson falls for the third time. While maintaining that *The Passion of the Christ* must be seen to be discussed, and seen in its integrity as a work of art, he has declined to let film critics watch the picture in advance. I make no special claims for reviewers. We may do our jobs well, or we may do them poorly; but all of us, however foolish or fallible, are dedicated to the very task that Gibson claims to want performed, although he'd rather not help us carry it out. I can assure you, we have had many more opportunities to preview *Eurotrip* than to see *The Passion of the Christ*, which has remained unavailable to every critic of my acquaintance until immediately before the public opening.

As a marketing tactic, Gibson's decision makes good sense. Enormous advance publicity and a wide release have given him the classic critic-proof opening, with crowds of the curious guaranteed for the first week. More important, he can sustain the box office he generates, having presold *The Passion of the Christ* to a multitude of churchgoers who don't ordinarily hang out at the movies and certainly don't pay attention to reviews. (By now, quite a few members of this target audience will have seen a tract titled "Who Killed Jesus?" which is adorned on the cover with a photo of Gibson and on the inside with a strong recommendation for *The Passion of the Christ*. I picked up my copy on Broadway, from a Brooklyn-based evangelist.) Under these circumstances, Gibson correctly calculates that he should dismiss the reviewers, having nothing to gain from them.

But then, speaking as one who has been dismissed, I must complain of my unfortunate set of choices. Either I can catch Gibson's movie on opening day, February 25, and write about it then (in which case the article won't appear until mid-March); or else I can review *The Passion* now, unseen.

For the greater glory of cinema…

The Passion of the Christ is an intensely brutal movie, whose spiritual center is located firmly behind the camera. As director and co-screenwriter, Mel Gibson is all but ecstatic before the agonies he has so painstakingly staged, and with which he so completely identifies. His surges of emotion carry you through the picture—which puts the purported central character at a disadvantage.

James Caviezel, who plays Jesus, brings to the part an El Grecoish face and mournful demeanor that have served him well in somewhat similar roles: the saintly GI in *The Thin Red Line*, the buried and resurrected hero of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, the participant in a miraculous (if not altogether spooky) father-and-son relationship in *Frequency*. So lean that he looks tortured from the outset, as if his muscles couldn't

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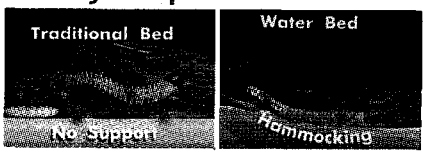

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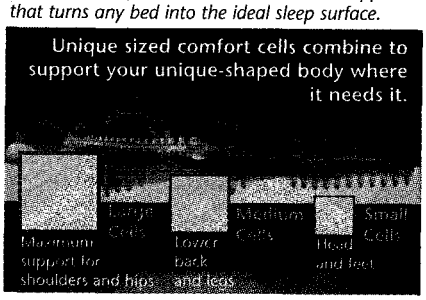
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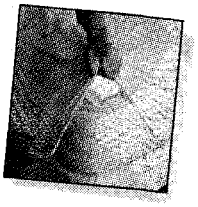

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quite stretch from one end of his long bones to the other, Caviezel takes naturally to the athletic round of sufferings imposed on him in *The Passion*; and yet his inherent otherworldliness, which you might have thought would infuse the creatural side of his Jesus with a suggestion of the divine, makes him opaque as an actor. Good film actors (such as Willem Dafoe in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, or for that matter Maia Morgenstern, who plays Mary in *The Passion*) have a knack for pulling in your attention and then directing it elsewhere, into the cinematic world around them. Caviezel, though, is always an object for the camera to study, never a consciousness that opens up its own viewpoint within the screen. (You might say the same for the beautiful yet perpetually blocklike Monica Bellucci, who is the film's Magdalene.) The casting of Caviezel is the telltale problem of *The Passion*; it betrays Gibson's desire as author, perpetrator, rapt witness and vicarious Christ to see for a Jesus he has himself made blind, to think for a Christ he's made thoughtless.

The decision to have the actors mouth Aramaic and Latin only worsens the problem. Although some viewers will be able to follow the dialogue unassisted (I know a handful of such people, all of whom teach at the Jewish Theological Seminary), the great majority of us will need to read the subtitles, so that our eyes must focus not on Caviezel's face but on the blocks of letters at the bottom of the screen. In this way, too, Gibson diminishes the performances while magnifying the importance of the text. Toward what end, I wonder?

In one sense, he is merely the latest in an odd but influential line of filmmakers who have aspired to make literal transcriptions of a text, or at least are said to have done so. The earliest was Erich von Stroheim, whose *Greed* (1924) became legendary as an exhaustive, paragraph-by-paragraph realization of Frank Norris's novel *McTeague*. The legend is nonsense, of course, as the critic Jonathan Rosenbaum has demonstrated; but it's persistent nonsense, which helped establish Stroheim's reputation as an artist implacably at odds with venal Hollywood.

Next in line comes a great Catholic filmmaker, Robert Bresson, whose version of Bernanos's novel *Journal d'un curé de campagne* is central to one of the most important polemics in film history: François Truffaut's 1954 essay "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français," the founding document of auteurism. In an astonishingly slippery maneuver, Truffaut used the alleged faithfulness of Bresson's film (faithfulness to the spirit, not the letter) in order to deride a competing adaptation by the screenwriters Aurenche and Bost. Truffaut sank these old-guard figures by exposing the liberties they had taken with the Bernanos text, and did so with such vehemence that you might have thought their unrealized project had actually been filmed. Talk about judging a movie by its screenplay!

The next text on the list, curiously enough, concerns the death of Jesus. In 1963, Manoel de Oliveira brought out his *Acto da Primavera*: a picture that faithfully and patiently records a passion play done in rural Portugal. The trick here is that Oliveira for the most part does not present *Acto da Primavera* as a documentary. Instead, after providing a brief frame, he lets the story take over, so that you soon feel you're watching a fiction film, performed by stiff but fascinatingly unselfconscious actors.

Then in 1978, in what was arguably his greatest achievement, this same Oliveira did for the classic Portuguese novel *Amor de Perdição* (Doomed Love) what Stroheim was only said to have done for *McTeague*. Over the course of a four-and-a-half-hour film, Oliveira has his performers act out the entire text—an exercise that sometimes requires them to pause in their tracks, while a voiceover narrator catches up with a lengthy patch of narration.

What do we learn from this brief history? That textual literalism in film has primarily been a matter of false claims, misdirection, illusionism and irony. Mel Gibson distinguishes himself in this tradition in two ways. First, he's dead serious, as if textual literalism could in fact be achieved. Second, he bases his work not on a novel or even a passion play but on a text that he takes to be inerrant—and by this move he doubles the stakes.

This doubling is what most troubles me. Yes, I'm also troubled by the encouragement that *The Passion of the Christ* may give to Jew-haters. A worry isn't necessarily baseless, just because the preposterous Abe Foxman voices it. (Nor is every reassurance to be swallowed, just because it comes from as smooth an actor as Mel Gibson. It's unthinkable that he would be an anti-Semite, Gibson explained on TV to Diane Sawyer; to be anti-Semitic would be un-Christian. To which I counterpose this statement by Godfrey de Bouillon, recorded after his Crusaders had slaughtered the entire population of Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter in July 1099: "And then, when we thought that the Savior had been sufficiently revenged by the death of the Jews and other infidels, we went with tears to worship at the Holy Sepulcher." The teachings that inspired de Bouillon were repudiated by the Vatican when I was just entering high school.) But, beyond my parochial squeam-

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ishness over this movie, I'm concerned at how Gibson forecloses any interpretation. "It is as it was." Disagree with the film in any way—even to point out how the Gospels are at variance with history—and you disagree with revealed truth.

However much you might play at seeing his work as just another movie, Gibson has gone outside the normal bounds of show business and into the territory of America's religious absolutists: John Ashcroft having himself anointed with oil, gay-hating lawmakers attempting to write Leviticus into the Constitution, antiabortionists shooting to kill, generals declaring holy war against the Muslim infidel. Our country has a great, great many such people who do not consider their convictions to be open to discussion. They maintain a significant hold on political power; and since a lot of them have an antinomian streak, I doubt the rule of law would stand in their way, should we manage to loosen their grip. The ever-boyish and ingenuous Gibson, with his simple faith, has made *The Passion of the Christ* as a gift for these people.

Thumbs down. ■

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PUZZLE NO. 2931

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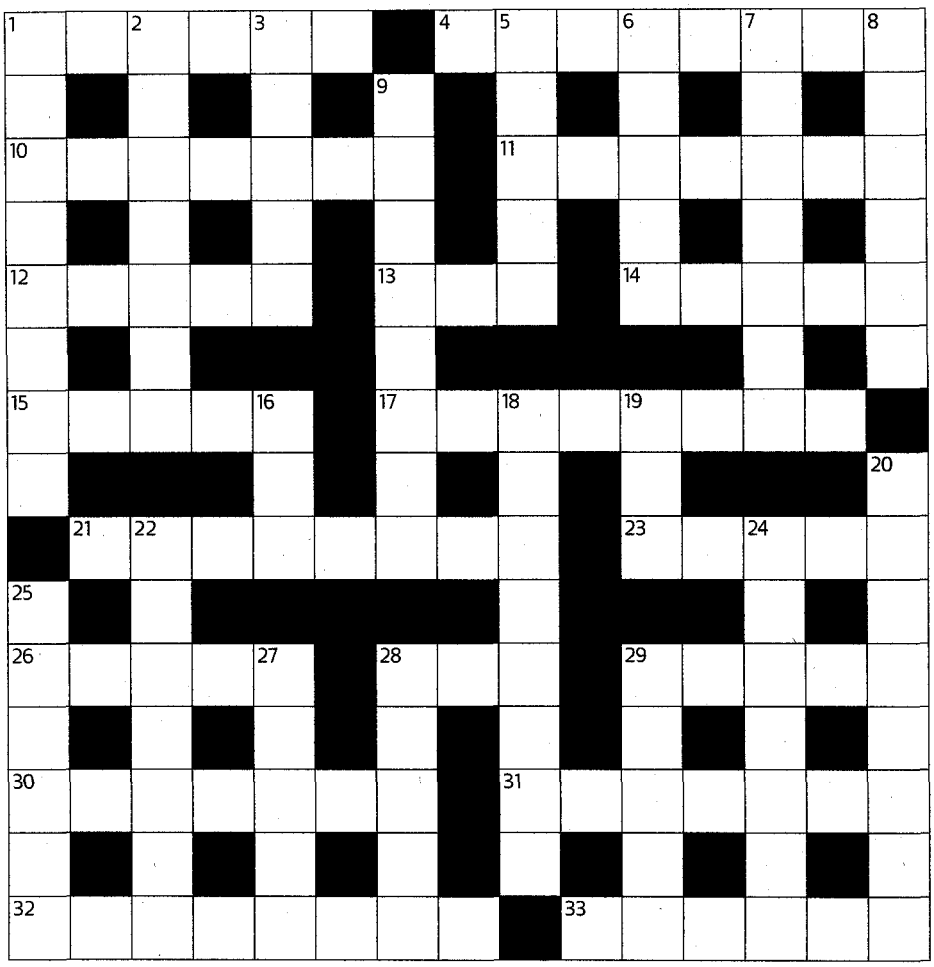

ACROSS

1 and **4** With this, do you have more than one manual—or is it only something someone has read before? (6-4,4)

10 Arrive shortly, getting inside here in Germany via a British-American fighter (that's a real dog!) (7)

11 Howling like the little girl in the comics, when she comes back to meet the worker. (7)

12 The form of oxygen in the place Dorothy visited has a rather small number. (5)

13 See 28 across

14 A woman of low repute returns to find herself in Oklahoma. (5)

15 Nothing in the present condition is a place of refuge. (5)

17 What happened when the dynamite blew up in the stone quarry? Helianthemum! (8)

21 The sort of cane that acquires a way to show super-fondness, according to the story. (8)

23 Get rid of the unwanted person? "Haha!" is more like it—(5)

26 —or just "Ha!" conditional on a place to visit. (5)

28, 13 and **29** across The reason some people put seed out is crazy! (3,3,5)

30 Shoppers are often just this. (See no ruler!) (7)

31 A card-player's ploy is excellent, up to a point! (7)

32 and **33** Getting in deep water with lots of baggage? Or are they just a put-on? (8,6)

DOWN

1 and **25** The way some pronounce a Cardiff University could be more like a pod. (6,2,6)

2 Do they grow up to be carmen who can hold a lot of corrosive stuff? (7)

3 One is confused by the racket, obviously! (5)

5 Entertain one of those nine sisters connected with song, poetry, etc. (5)

6 Associate it with Thomas, perhaps, but do make it different! (5)

7 What those priestesses at the shrine gave out is not quite so clear. (7)

8 Where troubles were put in the air, at one time. (Carson brings up a lot of talk with it.) (3,3)

9 Someone like Cicero seems to have 10, but it involved a lot singing. (8)

16 and **19** The baglike structure is colored but entitled to veneration. (6)

18 A command to "scram" might suggest what the tidy like to do to the desk. (5,3)

19 See 16

20 The stage type, though seemingly private, are meant to be heard. (8)

22 A likely place for a shower of rain, and something that the Gentleman of Japan might have to get around. (7)

24 What a member of the pigeon-toed clan does, and goes to bed. (5,2)

25 See 1 down

27 Max may be confused about 10, but it's a self-evident truth. (5)

28 A smoke, as they say, given to an overtly villainous type, as Oliver found out. (5)

29 Does one make a bad mistake when he cuts away all but the meat? (5)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2930

T	H	I	C	K	L	Y	■	S	E	T	T	L	E	D
E	■	O	■	O	■	A	■	A	■	A	■	O	■	R
M	I	N	U	S	■	R	I	P	■	G	A	W	K	Y
P	■	I	■	H	■	O	■	S	■	O	■	E	■	C
E	L	A	T	E	S	■	S	■	B	R	I	D	G	E
R	■	■	■	R	A	P	T	U	R	E	■	■	■	L
S	N	O	W	■	P	■	A	■	E	■	B	A	L	L
■	■	F	■	M	I	S	T	R	A	L	■	W	■	■
D	O	F	F	■	E	■	U	■	K	■	P	L	U	S
I	■	■	■	S	N	O	R	K	E	L	■	■	■	C
M	U	S	C	A	T	■	E	■	R	E	D	S	E	A
P	■	T	■	F	■	S	■	A	■	A	■	Y	■	L
L	O	O	F	A	■	A	I	R	■	S	T	R	I	P
E	■	I	■	R	■	L	■	E	■	E	■	I	■	E
D	E	C	L	I	N	E	■	A	N	D	F	A	L	L

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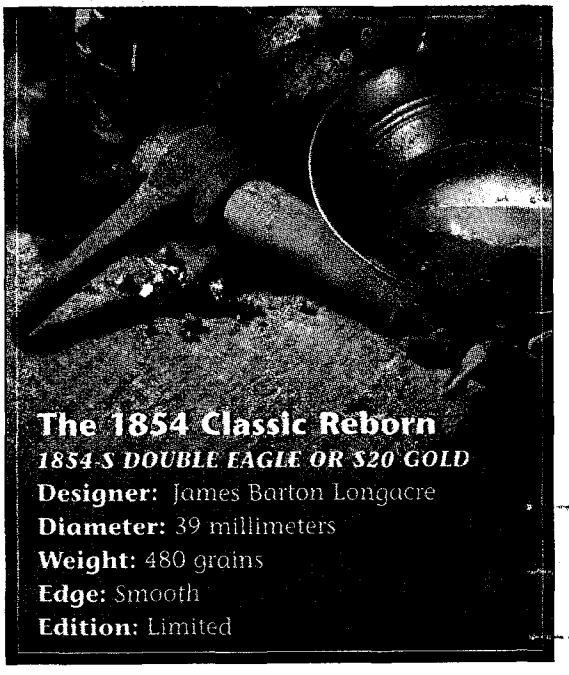
Accidental Discovery of Mysterious "Gold Rush" Coin Stuns Experts

World's Rarest U.S. $20 Gold Proof Found: The San Francisco Mint 1854 Double Eagle Proof!

WASHINGTON, D.C.—A one-of-a-kind U.S. Treasury gold proof coin has been accidentally discovered within the vaults of the Smithsonian Institution. This 1854-S gold Double Eagle $20 coin was struck by the San Francisco Mint in its first year of operation. The San Francisco Mint was born out of the need for a Western Frontier Mint when, in January of 1848, gold flakes were discovered at Sutter's Mill triggering one of the most important chapters in U.S. History—The California Gold Rush! To the surprise of historians, this single "S" mint Proof coin was individually struck from specially polished minting dies. How this unique Proof Double Eagle made its way across the continent and then into the hands of the Smithsonian Institution is an unsolved mystery to this day.

Today the First Federal Mint announces the public release of the first ever gold Proof commemorative honoring this rarest U.S. Government $20 gold piece. This 10mil gold Proof has a frosted image against a deep mirror field, creating a breathtaking work of art in gold. This 150th anniversary Mint release honors the legacy of a true historic masterpiece.

The magnificent 10mil gold proof measures a full 39mm diameter to truly showcase the beauty and intricacy of this legendary coin design. The 10mil gold proof is available only through this limited edition, private release from the First Federal Mint at the advance issue price of $19.95 each.



Fabulous Rarity Valued at $12 Million.

Only one original proof coin is known to have been struck. Even the foremost rare coin experts were unaware of its existence until it was accidentally found deep in the vaults of the museum. America's foremost authority on U.S. gold coins, David Akers, has written, "the 1854-S Double Eagle is easily the most significant and desirable branch mint proof coin in existence". With the recent auction sale of one of the three 1933 St. Gaudens Double Eagles for $7.9 million, senior numismatist Nicholas Bruyer estimates the unique 1854-S Proof Double Eagle would bring at least $12 million if it ever becomes available at auction.

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2004 marks the 150th anniversary of this historic mint striking. The First Federal Mint is releasing this collectors quality 10mil gold Gem Proof to honor the legend, lore and legacy of the 1854-S Double Eagle!

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